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Where the partridge pipes through stubble and dell,
Where the honey-bee roves o'er purple clover,
Where chivalry reigns, where brave men dwell,
And the fairest lassies the wide world over.

'MONGST THE HILLS OF KENTUCKY

BY

LIZZIE ARNETT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

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PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY
R. H. CAROTHERS & SON
LOUISVILLE, KY.
1909

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'MONGST THE HILLS OF KENTUCKY.

CHAPTER I.

Margit Ellen's Tooth Convention.

Oh no, she was not the strikingly handsome lass her cousin Lute Kenner was; neither did I find, on our first brief encounter, evidence indicative of superiority in any respect. Take it all in all, to me, then, she seemed a commonplace young girl, this Laura Dane.

It was a peculiar and startling event that threw us together the second time, when my mind underwent a decided change. She was visiting her uncle Bob Kenner's family, and it was her aunt Margaret Ellen, abbreviated into Margit Ellen, for the sake of economizing time, I suppose; and Margit Ellen had one of the "spells" she frequently indulged in, being a nervous, chimerical character with a fixed and steadfast belief that each "spell" would end her mortal career.

I have known her from girlhood to present time of speech—known her as one to whom, when an idea catches her, it clings

with unrelenting tenacity. If she decides in her mind that white is black, and desires to convert you to her belief, you might as well give up your idea first as last; you have that to do, or knock her entirely out of the ring, which event would bring about an eternal abrasion in the good, kindly feeling she'd always entertained for you. At every chance encounter she will fling up her pretty head, dilate her nostrils, snort like a war-horse and return to the fight. Complaining ever, honestly believing she has some serious ailment, taking every malady she hears of, whether epidemic or otherwise, yet possessing the happy faculty of exchanging one disorder for another, hence no serious harm resulting from any. There are times when she is violently assaulted by one of these accommodating troubles and assembles the doctor and neighbors to witness her last struggle, yet she so far has floundered through and pulled up on the safe side. Bob married her for her pretty face and clinging disposition, such a loving, twining little mortal as she was. He was sorely cheated, but, brave, kind man that he is, he makes the best he can of a bad bargain and utters no complaint. There are many men and women who, in the matrimonial game, make selection of a sorry chance, though others more wise, secure a good chance; others still who

marry before they get a chance; to this last class belonged Bob Kenner; but, being a good, kind, indulgent husband, and possessing a considerable share of this world's goods, Margit Ellen has ample time to invest in and enjoy whatever malady she prefers.

At one period of his life Bob indulged freely in the practice of conveying home by the pocketful the almanacs so lavishly distributed by store-keepers, etc. Margaret Ellen devoured greedily each; and they being crammed full and running over with every known disease that humanity is heir to, with an unfailing remedy for each ailment, she, coming in such close contact with these troubles, was invariably attacked by the most virulent complaint the almanac had, and forthwith Bob would be called on to hasten and get the remedy recommended. Consequently she had always a store of diseases and a remedy for each, to draw from when needed. And bottle after bottle of these patents would she swallow and yet live on. Bob found he was sinking money on almanacs, so at last refused with thanks whenever a cargo was offered him, and now you can't find one on the plantation, blue, green or yellow—not a thing to set the clock by, only the coming and going of the trains.

But to proceed with my second encounter with Laura Dane. One day I was visiting Margaret

Ellen, and she was exhibiting a beautiful, bright quilt she'd had made—"The Morning Star," I think she called it, though it might have been the "Evening Star." Anyway, she was folding this quilt, preparatory to putting it away. Having a serious case of rheumatism in her right hand, and not being able to use that member, she caught one corner in her teeth, not a corner of the rheumatism, mind you, but a corner of "The Evening Star"—no, "The Morning Star,"—and just as she clamped severely down on it, Lute, who was assisting, gave her corners a quick, smart jerk, when out popped two of her mother's front teeth.

It may be, if your imagination is lively and equal to the task, you can fancy what character of a tempest they two involved me in. That proverbial tempest in the tea-pot was only a glimmer beside it. Margit Ellen screamed, howled, moaned and groaned, as best she could, with her hand clamped tightly over her mouth. Lute skipped here and there, performing a war dance, with accompanying music: "I didn't go to do it! Oh, I didn't go to do it!" Sometimes she was clinging to her mother's skirts, then with arms embracing her would pull her this way and haul her that way over the floor, for she was a stout, sturdy girl, and her mother frail and easily handled.

Oh! I thought, what can I do? What shall I do? I honestly believe I could have surrendered every tooth in my head with less clamor.

The tempest prevailed till Bob came on the scene, bringing relief in a promise of carrying his wife right away to the tooth dentist (as my old man calls that class of people), and get two more pretty new teeth; which he did with considerable tax on his pocket-book, for she was unrelenting in her determinaton to have a gold plate, and it called for no small sized nugget, as her mouth on the interior was of good dimension, of which the exterior was very misleading, being rather a puckered affair, made expressly, it seemed, for kissing. She got her teeth and they were beautiful and white and natural looking, but she declared they felt uncomfortable, and over half the time she wore them in her apron pocket, on the mantle board, or in some drawer —at night, under her pillow, for fear while in an unconscious state she might swallow them, having a good available throat—rendered thus, I suppose, by swallowing so many patents—I mean medicines. The old man declared to me often he'd "rather die of a disease than to be killed by the cure." But I am honestly impressed that patent medicines are ineffective, either in harming or helping you.

Would you credit my word were I to tell you that she lost those teeth one day and got it into her head she'd swallowed 'em? She did, for a fact.

At that particular time Laura Dane was making them another visit, and Margit Ellen thought proper to hang some white muslin curtains over the windows in Lute's room. For that purpose, not being sufficiently tall, she climbed onto a chair to facilitate the work, reaching the remainder of the way as best she could with her head thrown back. The mouth naturally falls open with the head in that position. When she climbed on the chair the teeth were in her mouth; when she descended they were missing. Into her pockets she went; down under tables, dresser, bed, on the bed, mantle, etc., into her pockets again—no teeth. Then a peculiar sensation of the throat took possession of her, and she knew on the instant where they were—she'd swallowed 'em! She made a stampede for the lower room, with hands clasping her throat, she fell on the bed, explaining, with great effort to Laura and Lute what had occurred. Bob cut out for the doctor and neighbors hurriedly. When I reached her bedside a few friends had assembled. Granny Grimes was making a kettle of sage tea to dislodge the teeth by flooding, I inferred. Sage tea was Granny's

panacea for all troubles and ailments, from galloping consumption down to the toe-itch.

Lute was weeping and wringing her hands in an agony of distress, while Laura Dane went composedly about, searching for the missing articles. I thought she should show more interest under such peculiar and trying circumstances, but she said to me, in an undisturbed tone, that she'd looked down her Aunt Ellen's throat and found no foreign goods there. She was now pulling out drawers, peeping into boxes and turning things up-side down generally; and there was poor Margaret Ellen reclining in a propped-up position, breathing hard and laboriously, groaning, with her mouth spread to its utmost capacity, struggling and trying to tell us what pain the teeth were causing her, wedged down there in the larynx of her throat. She could speak only in vowels—"aw, aw, eh, eh, aw, aw, oo, oo," etcetera. I regretted there were not more vowels, so as to afford her greater opportunities at making her sufferings known, seemingly they were very acute.

I walked round to where Laura was investigating and asked in a subdued tone: "You don't believe she swallowed her teeth?"

"No," she replied, "it's an impossibility."

"I read of a man who did," said I.

"So did I," she replied, "but I didn't credit any such absurd story." She went calmly on with her searching.

"Suppose we go up to Lute's room and look about the windows," I remarked.

"I have been there, but will go again," she acquiesced.

Reaching the room, we went down on the floor, searching every nook and corner, under chairs, tables, across to the windows, drawing aside curtains and blinds, but all to no avail. While engaged in our search, Laura went on to say:

"I don't know what extravagant feat Aunt Ellen will execute next. She imagined she'd swallowed a pin once, and declares she can feel it wending its way outward through her ribs. Now it's her teeth. Next week it will be something else equally as absurd. She is no dissembler, either; she is fully convinced she swallowed these teeth, and is too sincere about it for the comfort of lookers-on. She is a strange combination of kind-heartedness, hysterics and patent medicines, and is so thoroughly devoted to Uncle Bob and Lute."

"Yes," I returned, "Bob and Lute are the sunshine of her existence."

By this time we had concluded our fruitless search and had reached the door on our return.

Now there was a long, large mirror, swung between the two windows she'd been draping—it reached almost from floor to ceiling. When on our return we had got so far as the door, I was moved to look back. Facilitated by length of limb and my position across the room, it was an easy matter to see on top of that mirror, when, behold! from thence gleamed down upon us those teeth, in the cunningest, most laughter-provoking way you could ever think of. I never, never will forget that grin. Laura laughed outright at the spectacle. Running back, she snatched them down from their exalted position and fled down stairs with them.

We concluded she'd put them on the glass for safety and then forgot all about it.

"Here are you teeth, Aunt Ellen," says Laura in an unruffled tone.

Margaret Ellen's mouth went together with a smack, and she bobbed up as serenely from that bed of affliction as if nothing had occurred to mar the uneven tenor of her existence.

"Well, I do declare!" she ventured, with a smile.

"Thank you, Laura, how kind you are." Then turning to Granny and me she continued in placid tones, "Isn't this a lovely day?" We were sufficiently discerning to understand she wished to ignore the little episode of which we'd been

participants, and without further delay we took our departure, believing some such occasion would demand our presence again soon.

But pardon this digression, for Margaret Ellen is not the heroine of my story, although she fills a niche in its recital. My purpose was to tell you of Laura Dane's struggle to win bread sufficient to alleviate the hunger of three, who had been accustomed to all the luxuries money could purchase. Whether she failed or succeeded in her endeavor to scale the heights of poverty fate had thrust upon her, I will attempt to relate, if you have the courage to follow me through this narrative.

CHAPTER II.

A Struggle With Fate.

At the time of the tooth convention, I knew but little respecting the Danes, knew only that they were wealthy, influential people, living over adjacent to L———, twelve miles away. Jim Drane, Laura's father, was a speculator of some kind, said to be operating on borrowed funds, and that the bottom was expected to drop out of his business at any moment and let fall him and his family through the hole that was left, which thing did happen at no distant period; and to cap the trouble, as soon as the crash came, Jim took sick of grief, typhoid and pneumonia mixed, lay down and died, thereby flinging his family out on the merciless charity of the unheeding world, with not a penny they might call their own, after the indebtedness was canceled. Everything was sold—town house, country home, furniture, books. piano, pictures—not even that tomfoolery called bricabrac would Laura reserve: said it would be dishonest, and Margit Ellen declared, "If there had been a Garden of Eden some-

where convenient to which Laura might have retired she believed she would have sold the clothes from her back; that she thought carefully, earnestly of selling that fine suit of hair and purchasing a lot of honey-bees her father had bought to try his luck at bee-keeping, but Bob Kenner had so ridiculed the idea of a wig that Laura decided not to part with her pretty locks." Jack Winton, a rich young farmer living near us, bought the bees, also the piano, books, pictures, etc. Whether true or not, 'twas said Jim Drane was owing Jack money. The question arose also as to what Jack wanted with a piano, being a bachelor of thirty summers, but Jack knew his own mind, had always attended strictly to his own business and laid by considerable money on that line of action. Neither did he give satisfactory replies when questioned on whom that favored allotment should fall. Some folks got very impatient and wagged their tongues assiduously, and for quite a spell before the matter came to a head 'twas pretty well aired that Jack Winton loved Laura Dane, and would fain have married her, but she allowed Fred Norton, the son of a wealthy banker, to get possession of her heart before she had reached the age of sixteen. Lute Kenner obligingly enlightened me on these points. Lute was just the right age for tattling, and her mother,

feeling little interest in her girlish enthusiasms and confidences, I became the recipient of many ardent outpourings of a young girl's fancies. Oh, Lute was pure and sweet and loving and pretty. I courted her confidences, and gave ear to any amount of visionary chatter, that I might have her often to see me.

I knew Jack Winton well; he lived near us with a widowed aunt as housekeeper, at Hazeldean, his pretty home. I had never at this time seen Fred Norton, but it was expected by many, especially the *attend-to-everybody's-business-but-your-own* kind of people, that Mr. Norton would come to the rescue by marrying Laura and taking charge of the homeless, destitute family, consisting only of Laura, her mother and little brother Kenner. Laura's mother was Bob Kenner's sister, and a great invalid, who scarcely ever stirred beyond her own threshold.

Fred Norton didn't show up at all as caretaker, and one-half the know-it-alls said Laura was responsible, the other half contended she was not, but would marry him off-hand at a moment's notice. It happens quite frequently that women are misjudged in a matrimonial settlement. Lute informed me that Laura didn't propose burdening Mr. Norton; and there might possibly be another reason; besides, the Nortons were not inclined to receive Laura into the

family after the Danes lost their money. Bob Kenner settled the Danes in a cottage near him. The cottage was near Grimes Station, on the main line where the cars stopped going to and from L———. He could never get Laura's consent to make a home with his family. Her little cottage was near my own home, and to be neighborly and show respect to the new arrivals and due consideration for their losses, I took my knitting (as country people usually do carry some light work in making calls) one bright October afternoon and made them a visit. My sympathies always run out after those who lose, or those who take a sudden rise; it goes hard with most people either way.

Laura seemed pleased at having me call; I believe she was honest in her expressions of pleasure. She conducted me immediately to her mother's room, and when I first set eyes on Mrs. Dane I caught my breath quickly, for I was startled into the belief that she was dead, surrounded by pillows, ruffles and laces. Each article surrounding her was trimmed with pretty lace. Her face was almost as white as bleached linen; her eyes, I discovered when she raised them to my face, were blue as spring violets and bright as stars. She held a spray of late tea roses in her right hand; the other, resembling a

snow-flake, lay idle on the white quilt. Seemingly all you had to do to transform her into an angel was to clap a pair of wings onto her shoulders and give her a light toss up into the air. Oh, so dainty, so delicate and etherial-looking! For many, many days I recalled vividly my first sight of that frail, fragile little woman, and Laura's solicitude regarding her comfort. That she was a sister of Bob Kenner seemed incredible; he was all brawn and muscle.

While making my visit, Laura asked me how we kept Irish potatoes through winter. I replied: "We dig a hole in the ground two feet deep, size according to amount of potatoes to be cared for, line the excavation well with dry straw, pour in your potatoes, cover with straw, then mound up with the dirt thrown from the cavity; dig a channel around the base and roof over with three-foot boards, and, to use a favorite expression of the Old Man's, 'you'll have nice, plump "taters" till May.'" (Now, be it understood, this old man of mine had no more respect for the English language than he had for a stray "yaller" dog.)

"I bought my potatoes," said she, "and not wishing to trouble Uncle Kenner, thought I would bury them myself."

"The dear knows!" I exclaimed, glancing at her pretty white hands, "you don't mean it!"

"I do mean it," she replied; "come see my potatoes." I heard her mother sigh, and saw the tears come into her eyes as Laura and I started to the garden, where she had dug and scooped out a small cavity with the help of her little brother Kenner. I caught up the hoe and finished the work for her. I was familiar with all kinds of work, in and out doors; had often supervised the burying of potatoes; besides, I was learning to think much of Laura, and was willing to render her any assistance in my power; she showed such a disposition to rise up and stand alone that I was inclined to extend a helping hand.

When we had completed the work and lingered talking a moment, I looked across the adjoining lot and saw a dozen or more stands of bees.

"Whose bees out there?" I asked.

"Mine," she replied.

"Yours? What in the world are you going to do with them?" I questioned, aroused.

"Going into bee culture," she quietly answered.

"Have mercy on yourself, child, and don't engage in any such dangerous experiment as risking yourself in the company of *bees*. you'll get stung to death."

LAURA DANE

"Oh, no," she answered, "I shall fortify against stings. I have all the equipment for the purpose, have also a book called 'A B C of Bee Culture.' I hope to make a success of my venture after a thorough study of my book."

"Well," I remarked, "I might study the bee alphabet from A to izzard, and the only thing I'd succeed in would be to break my neck running from 'em."

Now, I'd heard of Jack Winton buying the bees at Jim Drane's sale, had got them for a mere song. No one made a bid but Jack, and they were knocked off to him at fifty cents a stand, for the reason that most people are afraid to handle bees, and it dawned on my mind that to get rid of them he'd given them to Laura.

"Where did you get your bees, Laura?" I questioned.

"They were father's," she answered. "He had thought of engaging in bee culture. Mr. Winton bought them, and hearing me say before the sale I should like to own them, he sold them to me for one dollar and fifty cents a stand, father paid three dollars."

"Oh! Oh! How could he—" I didn't proceed with my exclamation further. Had I done so, it would have ended—"how could he be guilty of anything so contemptible as to make you pay so much as that!" And he knew what a fight she

was having just then with adverse circumstances. I laid up in my mind to give Jack Winton a serious going over for this niggardly, avaricious act. In my mind's eye he looked then about the size of 6¾ cents.

Poor Laura, she was just entering on her struggle in an effort to fight the wolf, and if there was no more charity shown her by others than Jack had deigned her, the battle was likely to be a fierce one. I was disgusted with him, and there arose in my soul a longing to tell him just the impression his conduct had made on me. I watched with eager eyes for his appearing, I meant to handle him without gloves. Oh yes, indeed, he'd accomplished wonders in getting rid of a lot of no-account bees; she'd never realize a particle of benefit from her bees, notwithstanding her study of their language, for I supposed after their A B C she'd study their method of spelling, reading and writing, stinging and honey-making, etc.

CHAPTER III.

Jack as a Happy Lover.

Yes, I watched with much solicitude for his appearing, but my designs upon him were frustrated for some time; it was near Christmas before he came.

Jack Winton was a young man that old man Spindle and I esteemed very highly. He owned a plantation near us, a pretty home he called Hazeldean, and he came to our house so frequently to talk with the old man of stock ventures, crop prospects, the available methods on the extermination of potato bugs, Hessian flies and so on, that we'd come almost to regard him as a member of our family, so that I felt at liberty to take strenuous measures, as I then thought, with his inordinate love of gain. He came after the sharp edge of my ire had pretty well worn off, and my scolding was not as severe as I meant it should be. He listened with due respect and patience to my sermon, but I could see by the merry twinkle in that fine blue eye of his that it was all thrown away, for he burst out laughing before I concluded my harangue.

"Did you know Laura was giving me music lessons?" "She wanted the bees and I *needed* the music lessons. She wouldn't consent to teach me till I offered her the bees in payment. Only think, if I had sold as I bought, my lessons would not have extended over two months. Since she is to pay me eighteen dollars, I think I shall acquire a pretty thorough knowledge of music. I've only been getting lessons four weeks, and I've got as far as quavers, semidemi quavers and double semidemi quavers. The trouble is, she will allow me but two lessons each week; says I can do my practicing at home; for, understand, I get my lessons on Lute's piano, and beside Lute and me, she has two other music pupils and pretends the piano is fully occupied. Aside from this, at night she is teaching a grammar class of a dozen girls and boys. Being sadly deficient in English grammar, I was anxious to join the class, but she refused me outright—said she couldn't take charge of over-grown boys. Think of that, will you; as if I weren't old enough to conduct myself properly. Only last week, I believe it was, I found a gray hair among my black locks. I was filled with dismay for the moment, but recalled Laura's remark that I was an overgrown boy; that thought braced me up and tided me over some kind of a fit that I felt coming on." He talked rapidly and nervously.

"Now, there's Pete Grimes, who is two inches taller than I; she is teaching him Latin, and when—"

"See here, Jack Winton," I interrupted, "straws show which way the wind sets; you're not striving to gain a knowledge of music; all you're aiming at is to get near Laura Dean. How will that avail you when you know well enough she is plighted to Fred Norton and loves him; it's love that makes the most matches."

"Yes," he more calmly replied, "that's the line I'm working on: 'love begets love,' 'tis said."

"I've seen Mr. Norton," I interrupted, "and he's as handsome as—as Apollo, whoever Apollo is. I've heard Alma speak of Apollo as being a beauty, in a way that makes me believe she's well acquainted with him, and knows whereof she speaks, and I take it for granted Mr. Norton's as handsome as Apollo."

"And as profligate as Bacchus," returned Jack, "for he's a gambler and a wine-bibber."

"Don't let your jealousy cause you to deviate from the truth, Jack," I admonished, in a serious tone. "Who is Bacchus, anyway? I've never had the pleasure of meeting him." I was trying to be sarcastic.

"Possibly not," he replied laughing; "he's a relative of your Apollo, who was a trifling chap."

"You've never seen Apollo, and I doubt much if you ever heard of him till to-day," I returned, a little nettled over his criticism.

"But," says Jack, "I've seen his relative Bacchus, perform and his conduct dovetails nicely with Norton's. I have the history of Apollo and Bacchus in book form, and will fetch it over for your perusal, so you may understand your comparisons when made are correct ones."

I read his book, for I avail myself of every chance offer to get information. Old man Spindle and I are altogether different in that respect. Neither is he at all handicapped in conversation by the thought that his expressions are not of the most approved sort; says there is no sense in casting aside good every-day words for finiky Sunday talk. But, oh! the grain, the hay, the vegetables he raises, and the premiums he picks up at the fairs are sufficient to make him the chronic grinner he is. Yes, he is all right in his own sphere, and looks a thousandfold handsomer to me to-day than he did the hour I took him for better, for worse. Yet, notwithstanding this, we have our little diversities of opinion, but never scratch, kick or bite, however unkind and inhospitable he may feel

towards good English; my deficiencies in this are sufficient for the family.

Yes, I read Jack's book, and thought as Queen Bess did when she visited the numskulls at Coventry, at sight of whom they exclaimed: "Good Lord, how fair you be!" Whereupon she replied: "Good Lord, what fools you be!"

I certainly echoed her sentiments, when I read concerning those Greeks and other heathen. I thought they beat the whole Coventry baliwick for foolishness.

But to pick up Jack again. "I have seen Mr. Norton," I continued, "and can hardly condemn Laura for placing her affections on him. I like his appearance; he doesn't seem like a man given to backbiting or jealousy; but there's no telling what he would do if there were cause for jealousy, "for neither men or women are angels till they shake loose the earthly dust."

I had a strong friendship for Jack Winton, and I disliked having him bestow that great warm heart of his on Laura, with no prospect of a return on her part, and so I tried, but it seemed ineffectually, to dampen his ardor.

"Since it is impossible," said he, "to contemplate Mr. Norton as critically as you appear to have done, and not see his diamonds and cigarette, it is pertinent here to ask, if he was accompanied by the last-named articles?"

"Oh, well, Jack," I returned, "there's no harm in wearing diamonds, if one can afford to do it. If I'm not mistaken you wear one yourself."

"Not to obtrusiveness do I wear them. And granting it an innocent, weak leaning towards vanity, where is the innocence or wisdom in using wine to an excess, or lurking about gambling dens?" and he tapped his boot toe on the floor in a manner to accentuate what he said.

"He at least," said I, "betrayed good judgment when he fell in love with Laura and wanted to marry her."

"Thank you," he said, "I feel that a compliment to my own wisdom, and in the years to come we will see which she has the wisdom to accept, or, rather, to which she surrenders her affections."

"It is presumed she has already bestowed her affections on Fred Norton, and I believe she's a girl likely to fulfill a sacred promise," I returned.

"But there is such a thing as being off with the old love and on with the new," he said confidently. "When her honey crop is harvested, she will carry it over to L———, and peddle it around the streets. She'll never get into the Norton family after degrading herself in that manner. I encourage her all I can in the laud-

able enterprise. You need not look at me in that sour way, all things are fair in love and war, you know,'' he said, moving away.

So soon as Jack departed, I arrayed myself in shawl and bonnet and started for Laura's; for, truth to tell, I had learned to love her to the extent that Jack's information in regard to Mr. Norton had given me a restless desire to know something more definite.

I had heard of her night school and music class, and that she'd taken charge of Pete Grimes' education through the winter months, and he was to assist with the bees in the spring.

CHAPTER IV.

Pete.

As I wended my way across the fields that divided us from Laura's home, many thoughts took possession of me; but the one that obtruded itself mostly to the front was what Jack had let out about Fred Norton.

I had seen him only once. He had run down from the city on a wheel (Old Man calls them "he-bickles"), and had stopped at Barney Grimes' boarding house. Barney also kept groceries, and I had gone across to make a purchase. Reaching the store, the first object that caught my view was a stranger, an unmistakably handsome man, arrayed in a most elegant and becoming attire. Diamond ring, diamond stud, cigarette held daintily between lips or fingers, he was leaning contentedly back on the porch, in the autumn sunshine, while the diamond gleamed and sparkled in the morning light, as the hand holding the cigarette moved gracefully to and fro. Before Barney's introduction, I knew intuitively it was Fred Norton down to

see Laura. I felt glad in my heart for her sake. I didn't like to entertain the thought, or have others think, the love affair between them was a one-sided thing; and now here he was and hadn't given her up at all, and I made up my mind instantly to like him and to espouse his cause, notwithstanding my friend Jack Winton. He didn't look like a man who imbibed too freely, and I wouldn't believe it, although the thought clung persistently to me every step I took in the direction of Laura's. Finally, by force of will, I drove it from my mind and caught up another strain: that was, how Laura proposed to manage such a big, lazy lout as Pete Grimes. True, he took to books amazingly, but work—ugh!

I knew that bee business would require work from some quarter, and I believed if Laura meant to place the duty on Pete's shoulders, the enterprise would collapse. He was dodgy about work; indeed, he'd had fine practice in dodges of various kinds, had spent about two years of his childhood dodging the switches Barney, his father, had kept constantly whisking in the atmosphere surrounding his little legs and shoulders. After a chastisement of this nature, he would generally hide away for a day or so; and his mind, when it did not lead him to the obscurity of the hay-loft, would take him to Miss Jeannett Carvil's. She was an old maid who, in ante-

bellum days, could lay claim to many lovers, many friends, many slaves and much lands; now with the exception of two old family servants, she was alone. And Pete usually turned to her after a skirmish at home, and always met with comfort and sympathy. As the years grew on apace, the bond of friendship existing between them was intensified, for Miss Jeannett owned a library, well stocked with valuable books, which Pete borrowed and eagerly devoured.

Yet Barney had cleared his skirts as far as the Scripture enjoined it upon him not to spare the rod, but in this instance too much use of the rod seemed to have had a contrary effect to the one desired; for, however warm and lively the occasion on which that rod played its part, it never inspired Pete with a desire to work. If he was set to hoeing potatoes, or ploughing old Jule in the corn patch, the first thing Barney knew the hoe would be idle, old Jule sleeping placidly in the furrow, while Pete, spread out in the shade, would be pouring over one of Miss Jeannett's books. He got on nicely in school till on one occasion, when twelve or thirteen years old, he and the teacher disagreed over the correct pronunciation of a word. They came almost to blows, and Pete, to prove he was right, trudged all the way to L——— and borrowed an unabridged dictionary of Judge Hol-

lis. However, he was expelled from school for knowing more than the teacher and raising a row about it. It appeared the trustees of the school had more respect for the teacher than for the unabridged dictionary, though I heard it was of enormous size.

Barney put him in the grocery, in which he kept a few drugs; in this capacity he came well nigh being the death of several people—gave one man tartar emetic instead of cream tartar, etc. One old lady, desiring to make a cake, and having on hand at the same time a sick neighbor in need of calomel, went to the grocery to supply the needs of each. Pete weighed it up all right, but made a mistake in labeling. The old lady administered the cream tartar to her friend with wonderfully good effect; made her cake, using the calomel, and, being of an economizing turn, she licked the bowl the cake was made in. The cake failed to materialize properly, but the calomel performed its office admirably; in fact, to the extent that a doctor's presence became necessary to assuage the disturbance. Barney paid hush money and no more was heard about Pete's mistake.

About this time Granny Grimes said to me: "Pete's tuck a mind to go to Callyforn and live on a rench all by hisself, and it is turrible heart-breakin' to think of."

I replied: "In all probability it would be the upbuilding of Pete."

"Yes," said she, "but it would be the down-pullin' of me and his mother; it makes me weak in the knees to think of him gwine off so fur, with not a sign of kin to look after him. He's the master boy to keek the kiver off at night ever was, and Betty alers looks to it that he's got the blanket well pulled up about his naik and years. 'Sides, ther's that loop to run th'ough on the road, an' who knows but he'd git his head into it and hang tell he choked to death. He tole me his own self the danger of gittin' on the yander side of that thar loop. Barney's got a lot of money, an' ef he'd unly give 'im a chance at schoolin', he'd do well enough whar he's at, fur he's alers sayin' a book of some sort or nuther."

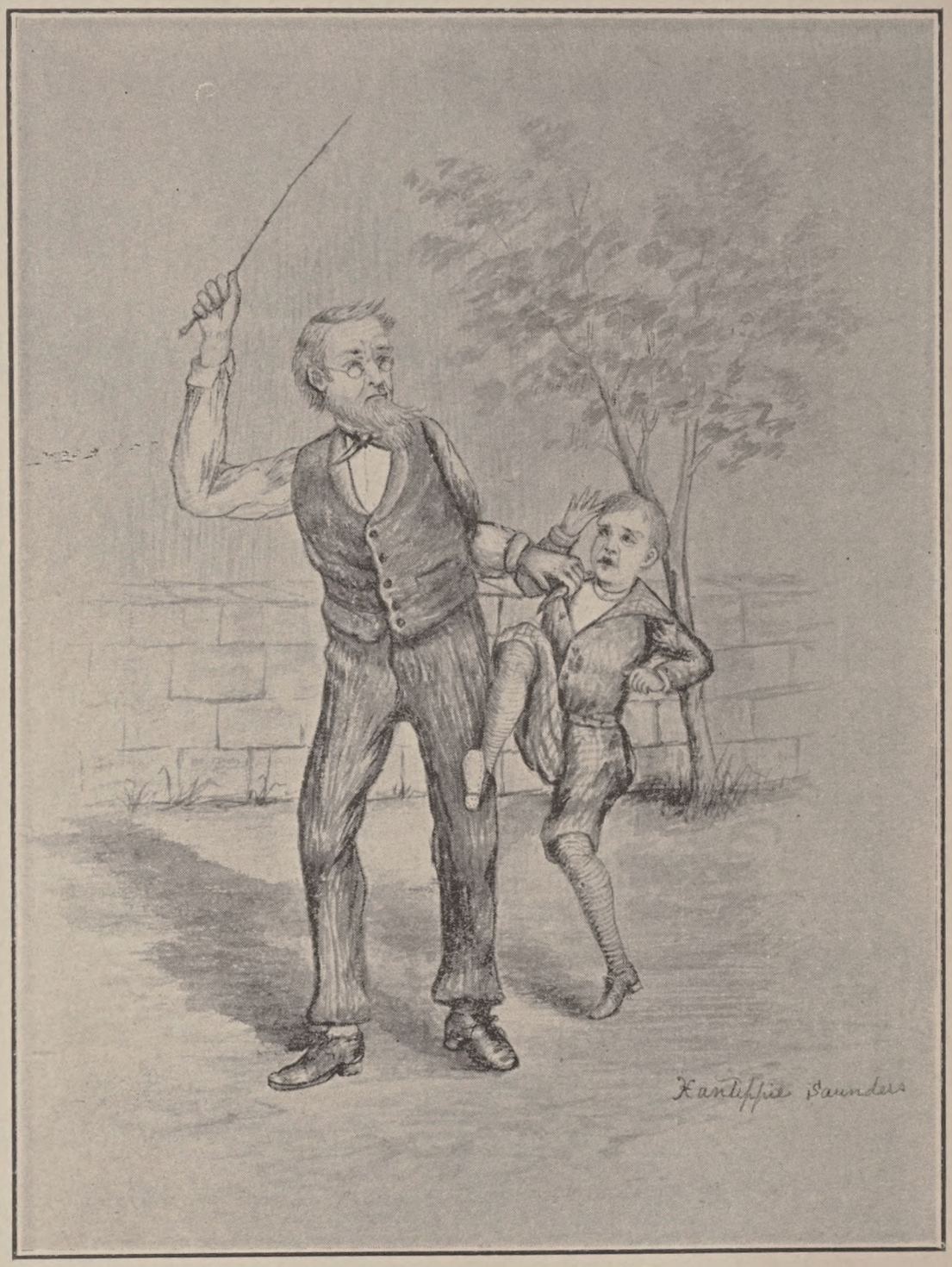
Pete's journey to California was postponed indefinitely, or till his mother should become accustomed to the thought of giving him up. His intention was kept constantly before her by his frequency of mentioning the fact. Pete loved his mother and disliked the pain he would cause her by an abrupt departure. But it happened just at the time his plans for leaving culminated, Laura came and the trip to California was abandoned.

I trudged on and soon reached my destination. Stepping on to the porch, I heard a hammering, as though some one were driving nails; from the same direction came a murmur of voices. Kenner answered my knock and tiptoed me into his mother's room, where I found her looking more angelic than ever, for she was quietly sleeping. A strange young girl of pleasing appearance was present in the room. I had heard of Laura taking from the city a poor, friendless, homeless young girl—Nellie Bond by name. I recognized this pleasant-faced girl as she before Kenner informed me in a whisper that it was Nellie Bond. He also informed me she could cook some, but nothing like I did, because she got her receipts out of a book, whereas mine were home made and I carried them around in my head.

Yes, I had heard of Nellie Bond's advent. Few things transpired in our little village that the inhabitants did not soon become cognizant of, and children such as Kenner were wonderful inventions in keeping vibrant any little item; the most trivial matter was of interest to all, so we had no secrets at that time.

Now this same little Kenner was a special friend of mine. He would run over to see me as many times as there were days in the week, and I kept some dainty ever ready for his digestion,

and it was marvelous the amount he could entertain, seemingly without inconvenience. A loquacious little chap, could propound more questions than you could answer in a life-time. A perfectly rounded-up interrogation point. The dictionaries and encyclopedias were not in it in giving correct answers to his queries. He was also far-reaching in his search after knowledge, not confined to any particular line or method in his explorations, but continually on the alert for information. One day, while in my garden, we found some late blooming Johnny-jump-ups. He wanted to know why with equal propriety they couldn't be called Johnny-jump-downs? Why butterflies weren't more appropriately called flutter-bys, for that was what they did, and it was seldom, if ever, you could catch one; and why gallinippers weren't called girl-nippers? Once he asked me why people didn't begin at the other end of life and grow young instead of old. Where did thoughts and thinks come from? Did they get into a body's head through ears, nose or mouth; how, when they got there, they managed to get on the tongue and say things? And why we didn't say thunk instead of think? I felt a little more at ease in grammar than metaphysics, but nothing to boast of in either, so answered him as well as I could in the first; evasively in the



"Dodging the switches Barney, his father, kept constantly whisking in the atmosphere about his little legs"—Page 27

last. "Ask Laura, and when Alma comes home, ask her; she knows everything."

"Who told Alma things?" was the next query, "and how did *them* that told her get their information?"

"Ask her, ask her, ask her," was my reply.

Upon the occasion of my visit to Laura, after gazing intently for a moment upon his sleeping mother, he turned to me and asked in a breezy whisper how folk got to and fro from dream places so quickly without getting on the cars, or riding a wheel. Did they just fly or jump back home as their eyes came open? To quell him at once I dropped my hand into my apron pocket and drew therefrom a few ginger snaps, handing them to him, I asked where Laura was.

"Her 'n' 'Ete's in er 'koo' 'oom," he replied, as well as he could for the three ginger snaps he had stuffed in his mouth and was striving to masticate.

He meant to say: "Her and Pete are in the school room."

After craning his neck and struggling a moment, he swallow the snaps and said: "Pete's at his Latin, come and hear him." Which we did.

I had discovered Laura was ingenious and clever, but what was my surprise to find her hammering her bee-hives together in a way I

had never dreamed of seeing her or any other woman do. Pete sat with his chair tilted back against her work-bench. He reposed there in all his indolent glory, gabbling like a goose from an old greasy, yellow-back book. As near as I can recall, this is what he was uttering: "I'm a mole, I'm a ram, I'm a rat, I'm a banner, I'm a banty, I'm a bat," and so on and so forth. There was not an atom of sense in it for me, be it Latin or bosh.

"The deary me!" I exclaimed, as I was towed into the room by Kenner, who had never lost his hold of my apron since I had given him the ginger snaps, in the hope, I think, that my pocket could reveal more snaps if it would.

"Laura Dane! what are you doing now?"

"Making bee-hives," she answered brightly.

"Well, bless my life, who would have believed it! And you, Pete, why do you not lend a hand and help her instead of gabbling like a Dutch Dago from that old greasy book?"

"He is reviewing his Latin," said Laura very sweetly.

"Well, Laura, I would not stand here and hearken to any such nonsense as that I heard when I entered this room."

"It's no more nonsense," she replied, "than nailing these strips together and making a bee-hive. Only see!" pointing to three hives already

finished. "I get this material ready for use, nothing to do but nail together."

Looking at me seriously: "You see I'm in down-right earnest about my bee venture. I'm making ready for swarming time next spring; but for my bees I should never have known with what dexterity I could handle saw, nails and hammer.

Pete rose from his chair with a yawn, closed his book and went in the direction of the door. I observed his shoe strings were tied, his collar buttoned and his hair brushed neatly away from a fine open brow, a thing I'd never known either to be guilty of before; indeed, he looked uncommonly neat altogether. As he passed from the room he turned and looked back at Laura, who had already faced about in his direction.

"To-morrow?" he questioned.

She nodded a smiling reply.

"Ta, ta," says Pete, and the door closed, shutting him out.

Laura evinced no displeasure at my intrusion; nevertheless, I apologized and then proceeded to inquire what she proposed making of that good-for-nothing, worthless lad. "You surely don't think you can turn him to account?" and I gazed intently at her through my spectacles, to give emphasis to my query; I usually wore them on top of my head.

She answered pleasantly: "I am not proposing to do anything with him; it is he who is putting his purposes into effect. I teach him this winter; in the spring and summer he is to assist me in my apiary. He is truly a very intelligent young man."

"He's no more than nineteen or twenty, and you call him a young man," throwing a little sarcasm into my speech, at which she seemed surprised.

"No matter what his age may be," she replied," he is thoroughly kind and courteous and will make a fine Latin scholar. Pretty soon he will go from his reader to *Seizeher.*"

Understand at that time I was ignorant of what she meant. Looking at her blankly, I inquired who "*she*" was, and what terrible thing had "*she*" done that he was going to "*seize her?*"

Oh dear me! I wish you could have seen the expression on her face at that moment, for I'm unable to describe it. She dropped onto the chair Pete had vacated and burst into a peal of laughter, spontaneous, uncontrollable, that stirred up my anxiety, not only for fear of awakening her mother, but on her own account; I didn't know but she'd really gone "franzy," as Old Man says of people who are delirious. Seeing Kenner laugh, I joined in for company,

but for the life of me I couldn't have told what caused our merriment.

Pretty soon she recovered her equanimity and explained who Cæsar was, even spelling the name for me.

I said to her: "Laura, it's a nice thing to be educated and understand all things, so as not to make mistakes and be criticised, and it seems strange that you are willing to chain yourself to a lot of bees in this dull village to teach a few donkeys (leaving out the girls) Latin, grammar and music. Why do you not seek another pasture, where you might graze on more intellectual herbage. Go to L——— and teach in one of the high schools."

She looked up at me sharply, a slight color coming into her face when I named the donkeys and answered me in a changed mood: "I could not go to L—— to teach, it would take me away from mother. I'm interested in bee culture, and cannot think at present of any other source by which I can gain a livelihood and have her near me. I am content here; I trust my bees will prove remunerative, as I have made a sacrifice of what small means I have had to supply myself with what is necessary to begin."

She picked up her hammer and gave a tap or two to the head of a nail that protruded from the hive she was at work on. I continued:

"But I suppose you will be heading towards L——— some day, as it is where Mr. Norton lives, and his business engagements would not allow him far from that point."

"In the event Mr. Norton's business engagements do not regulate my movements, what then?"

"But there's a prospect of you two going into partnership, you can't deny that."

"What, in bee culture?" she asked, as she picked up another nail and placed it for driving.

"Laura, you can't deny that rumor has it you're betrothed to Fred Norton."

I looked her straight in the eye as I made this observation. She didn't blush or blink, or give any other sign a girl is likely to that's in love with the man under discussion. I knew she had remarkable self-possession, and she might have prepared for this accusation. As she drove the nail home she answered indifferently: "I do not think of denying or acknowledging it."

Now I did not wish to thrust myself into her confidence uninvited, yet I was so curious and anxious in knowing if she trusted Fred Norton entirely, and I asked her abruptly enough: "Laura, is Fred Norton a liquor-loving young man, or a moral, all around good young fellow?"

As she looked from her work at me a troubled expression came into the bright brown eyes.

"I do not know; I trust he is the last named." Then more cheerfully as she noted my serious aspect: "You're not troubled over that thought on my account, are you? If so, put your mind at rest, I'm Laura Dane yet."

I brought my visit to a close with no satisfactory results, only troubled thoughts for Laura's welfare, and I wished Alma had not gone away, she was such a consolation in times of anxiety.

Now be it understood Alma Laurens was Old Man's half sister, was educated and all, and forever and eternally gone from home—off teaching, or proof reading, or helping to run a periodical. She called our house her home, but she was restless, dissatisfied with us, and seldom sought our roof as a shelter. She was not by any means as yet a homing pigeon.

CHAPTER V.

A COUNTRY WEDDING.

Christmas came and went. Three moons waxed and waned. In January and February the young people of the station and surrounding neighborhood entered upon a series of socials, parties and so on. Gayety reigned supreme. Laura didn't attend these randies often; when she did, Pete Grimes was her escort, which did not seem very remarkable at first, since she was teaching him. Lute kept me informed of their movements. About this time, the weather being cold and sharp, I lost scent of them for awhile, though an event occurred along the last of February that forced me into the giddy whirl of the Station society.

There was a wedding—Sally Ann Smart and Hack Piper took it into their heads to marry. Sally Ann, being the only daughter, and in consideration that Hack was a sure, safe chance, the Smarts made an elaborate affair of it. All the paraphernalia requisite in the culinary department was brought into play in the concoction of edible dainties, and a fine supper was the

outcome of the two weeks' baking, stewing, stuffing and tasting. Everybody neighboring the Station, far and nigh, young or old, got an invitation. With that mixed throng were to be found Fred Norton and Jack Winton; Jack was a neighbor, Fred was a visitor at the Station.

The old man and I got into our Sundayest attire and joined the multitude. Laura and Fred Norton came in just before the ceremony went off. Oh, I never saw so handsome, a so perfectly made up man outwardly in all my born days as that Fred Norton. On entering, he and Laura were muffled up to their eyes in furs. I heard one boy whisper to another: "They look like two polar *bars*." There was no disrobing room in this unconventional establishment. Every one came to the big front room and removed outer garments. When Mr. Norton divested himself of that fur coat and cap he was good to look at, to be sure, and I was down-right certain Apollo was no match for him. Tall and perfect in stature, dark hair and eyes rather dreamy, or sad, than gleaming, he and Laura were in the gayest spirits, the observed of all observers in that motley crowd.

After the ceremony of getting Sally Ann and Hack into matrimonial harness and supper over, we cleared the big dining-room of tables, and 'twas given over to the young people for

the enjoyment of their games; and what a convivial time they made of that evening! The sound of revelry ran higher than in Belgium's capital the eve before Waterloo. Not that I was in Belgium at that particular occasion, but I'd read of it, and am sure they must have had a rattling time; yet I know the well-mannered English could not, nor would not, have raised such a din as this lot of free-born American youngsters of which I'm telling you.

Jane Smart, Sally's mother, and I remained in the dining-room to see the fun—"Lookers-on in Venice," so to speak. As a beginning of the evening's amusement, there was a game called "Steal Partners," or some such name. Those young men wishing to participate chose a partner from among the young ladies and formed a circle around the room. There was a lad of good size placed in the center of the circle, with a large handkerchief twisted into a stinging flail, which he was to use as a goad to move up delinquents, or those negligent of duty in respect of being found partnerless. My attention was drawn only to my own small circle of young friends. I observed Jack Winton chose the bride, Pete Grimes appropriated Lute, who was chatting merrily with Doctor Brice, the doctor solaced himself by choosing Callie Hartly.

A young man entered the ring, dashing across to the opposite side, he snatched some one's girl; he, left alone, stole another, and the scramble for partners was on. Hither and thither they flew in frenzied haste, and mortal fear of the twisted handkerchief. They went at a two-forty rate, whatever speed that may be, to escape McDuff, who with hearty good will was plying the flail to any unfortunate youth whom he found partnerless.

Fred Norton had taken up a claim in the circle with Laura for a companion when they first set out on that insane thieving; but pretty soon Pete got a divorce, and quick as a flash he was leading Laura to his station. They'd not more than got settled than Jack Winton found himself companionless, and forthwith stole Laura from Pete, who instantly stole Norton's girl, and Norton whirled round and bore down on Jack's headquarters, with McDuff in full chase. Laura started again for her first home, but before they reached their destination, Pete wafted her away once more to his side of the settlement. At this, Jack, whose post was near me, broke into a laugh. Norton turned with an ugly frown on his handsome face; the next instant Jack was without a partner, with McDuff's goad embracing his broad shoulders;

but he darted across to where Pete and Laura stood and whirled her again to his side.

They whisked and switched those girls to and fro, hither and yon, till they must have gotten somewhat giddy, especially Laura, for when she and Jack halted she put up her hand to her brow. "I can't go on at this rate," said she.

"Certainly not," said Jack, as he led her to a vacant seat at my left, reaching for old man Smart's hat, that hung high against the wall on a nail. With it he began fanning her vigorously.

"How ridiculous!" she averred, with a smile.

"What, this unlawful purloining of a man's property?" he asked, placing himself in a protecting attitude between her and the revelers. He glanced over his shoulders in a sham, uneasy way to where the pilfering was going on with unabated fury.

"Oh no, I mean—I mean—" she stopped short, with a childish, troubled look into Jack's face.

"I know," he replied; "you think there are too many claimants for one little hand." And for just an instant he touched her hand tenderly.

She turned impatiently away, moved over by my side, looked across at Norton, and asked me if I didn't think the evening had grown

warmer; whereupon Jack, who was near by, waved old Smart's hat afresh.

"Do you mean to freeze me?" she asked, glancing up at him, a displeased look on her face.

"Oh, no," he replied pleasantly, "but if you are cold we will join this hurly-burly again."

"Oh, no, no," she answered decidedly, and cuddled up closely to my side, without another word to Jack, and I wondered where he found a place to which he might anchor even a dim hope of ever winning her. She appeared even to resent a kind look from him, and was constantly fighting his attentions.

Soon after this by-play of Jack's and Laura's the thieving game closed out, and some one proposed "Weavily Wheat." Jane Smart protested; said she knew nothing about the game, but the deacon had told her it was a "out'n' out" dance, and they wouldn't allow any "sich" under their "ruff." I informed her it was an old-fashioned country reel, with singing instead of fiddling, and I had in times afore assisted in stepping it off, and it was possible and altogether probable the deacon would object; but, I added, I could see no more evil in "Weavily Wheat" than in the affair just closed.

I saw Pete and Lute holding a whispered consultation, saw her smile up into his face and

nod an approval to some remark of his. I knew mischief was brewing, for you can make nothing of young people, and to attempt a metamorphosis would be a direct violation of the laws of nature. True, you might bundle the boys all into State prisons, where I've heard no speech was allowed, and by fair or unfair means, secure the girls in convents, and I honestly believe they'd make use of this new method of communication called telepathy (Old Man in reading calls it *tell patty*), thereby bringing convents and prisons into trouble.

Jane and I sat quietly awaiting developments. Pete gave Lute to Doctor Brice's care, and proposed in a loud tone the assembly should study multiplication. Said it was a new method of instruction and would prove beneficial to all. There was a hearty, unanimous agreement and he called out: "Choose your partners," with a look at Laura. "Come, Miss Laura," reaching a hand towards her. She telegraphed him a reply from her eyes; he swung round in search of another.

Jack yet stood near Laura and me, but he made no move to claim her. I saw her glance shyly at Fred Norton as he moved our way, but Ab Smart, an awkward, too-long-in-the-lower limbs-for-his-Sunday-clothes kind of a young man requested her to join him as Norton asked

if she desired to go in pursuit of mathematics. She was truly desirous of being sociable with the Station young people and accepted Ab's arm.

"Mr. Grimes," she called, "does this play in any respect resemble 'Steal Partners?' "

"Not in the least," answered Pete, as he led the bride to that part of the room where the performance was beginning. It seemed out of place that any one should bestow on *Pete* the title of *"Mr."*, for he'd never been anything but simply *"Pete,"* and I feared the bestowal of it might have a tendency to run into big-head; but I had not the time then to reflect much on the matter, for he was forming his lines for the fray, with partners facing—the same as for "Weavily Wheat," which nothing more nor less it was, with a different air and skippings here and there in multiplication.

"Now," said he, "fellow citizens and lady residents, we will begin with the second line of the multiplication table, and to facilitate the work and make it more cheerful, we will accompany with a little movement and a quick metre tune. Look out!" Off he plunged, with a hop and a jump, dragging Sally Ann along with him, for she showed a disposition to lag. Down and back again through the channel

formed by the two lines of youngsters, and to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," he applied this:

"Twice eleven are twenty-two,
And twice ten are twenty,
Twice twelve are twenty-four,
And twice fifteen are thirty."

He turned Sally Ann loose, cavorted around and swung the first young lady on his left, performed a double shuffle before the second and swung her. She was a very diminutive young lady and in making the circuit he lifted her bodily from the floor, her apparel fluttering like banners in the breeze, generated by her rapid transit across the channel dividing the opposing ranks. The next one to swing was a girl of considerable averdupois, but she proved a midget in Pete's hands, for he bounced her about as though she were a gum-ball to be toyed with, all the while singing his multiplication.

"Oh, Pete! Pete!" remonstrated Sally Ann, "I can't go any further with this, do stop!"

Pete bounded on, and without varying the time sang out his answer—

"Miss Sally Ann, if you don't care,
To study mul'plication,
Just quit the floor and let us go
On with our recreation."

Whereupon several deserted, but no word was spoken in objection to that particular method of acquiring mathematical knowledge.

Pete swung another, and on he cantered, standing not upon the order of going, but speeding on. There was a chorus of voices mingled with his not unmusical tones, but a heart-rending abuse of multiplication.

Says Irene Smart: "They do 'pear to ketch on right hearty; see how peert they set off the figers. I 'spose if they take it inter the'r heels as well as the'r heads, they'll have it prime; an' I b'lieve ef I had it to larn I'd ruther take it that way," and she smiled at me real lamb-like and unsuspecting. I said nothing, but thought if there was anything of whatever dimensions or shape or attitude that could fall athwart her vision and bring a smile to her careworn face, let it come; for she had many worries, ten children and carried generally a pulled-through-the-flax-hackle look about with her; also the deacon was domineering in his attitude toward his wife and family.

Pete swung along till he reached the bottom of the line where Laura stood, for she was as innocent as Jane Smart as to the character of the play. She was a member of the Baptist church, and I foresaw when that body heard of this little diversion of hers she'd have to

run the gauntlet of a trial. As Pete whirled her around she said something to him I didn't catch, but I heard his half audible reply of "ten thirty train." It surely wasn't anything very pleasant they referred to, for both looked serious enough when their eyes met, which was often. There seemed to be, all evening, a telegraph line running from his eyes to hers, in a way I didn't understand, and consequently didn't approve of. I was feeling cross at Laura for manifesting so much interest in Pete Grimes. Why was she so content down here at the Station with us country clods? Was the reason she gave me a true one? Perhaps she had some wild, fanciful ideas concerning Pete, and had endowed him in her mind with some very deserving attributes of character he did not possess, as far as my discernment could penetrate; or, she might hold some romantic ideas concerning marriage, as many young girls do.

I sat there and pondered and thought, thought and pondered. Thoughts are very quick, unruly and sometimes very impudent; offensively forward in taking hold on you whether or no, and will rain down upon you by the bunch. The one paramount in my brain was that she'd turned foolish and fallen in love with that freak of nature, Pete Grimes, and was going

to elope with him on "the ten thirty." I had read somewhat of romance and the hero and shero were up to just such by-play as this couple was practicing. I lost sight of myself and my surroundings, was deciding in my mind I would withdraw from Laura my friendship, cease caring for her in any respect. At this point Jane gave me a nudge in the ribs; with a quick questioning look into my face, asked if I was trying to learn it.

"Now,"said she,"if it didn't seem out'n place for old uns like us to understand sich things, we mought git out there and take a hand. I dare venter we could take it in quick as the youngsters."

"Jane," I said solemnly, "let's retire to another room.

CHAPTER VI.

A POLITICAL SPAT.

We found old man Spindle and Deacon Smart floundering in a political vat. As fast as one would climb to terra firma in his argument, the other by some convincing statement would souse him in again, for their political views differed. They continued bobbing up and down and floundering around in that political mud puddle of their own designing till I grew disgusted, and wondered how women could ever make up their minds to go rushing off into politics. I was anxious concerning Laura, and an uncontrollable desire fastened on me to be at the Station when the "ten thirty" came in. We lived beyond the railroad track, and by starting home early I could effect my desire; so I apprised the old man of my readiness to go home. As we trudged along he remarked:

"Now I 'low I've licked old Smart clean out 'n the political arena with the truths and argyments I brung to bear on his party and their carryin's on."

I replied: "You could both have licked till you'd have wrenched your tongues out in your efforts to clean each other up, and you'd have emerged from that lickin' filthy as ever. Whenever I see two old political blunders like you and Smart trying to rend a plank from each other's platform, or reconstruct State matters, I feel it is time for men of sense and unclouded views to take a back seat. Let me refer you to one instance of your incapacity to judge between right and wrong."

"Pitch in," he snapped.

He was ahead of me carrying the lantern, and I clutched him by the coat-tail to hold him quiet till I could say my say.

"John Isaac, don't you remember the man you helped to put in office three years ago? Don't you remember he favored the open saloon? Don't you remember the fight and struggle poor Tom Lane underwent to hold in subjection that craving appetite he had acquired for strong drink? Say! don't you remember it, John Isaac Spindle?"

"Oh, yes," said he, "I mind all that; but Tom, you know, was a weak-kneed kind of a fellow, and when temptation assailed him, w'y he went under."

"Who helped put the temptation in his way, do you know, Mr. Spindle?"

I never called him Mr. Spindle unless I was cross-grained in feeling.

"It was the very devil in you when you refused to listen to the pleadings of Tom's poor heart-broken wife the morning she entreated you not to vote that ticket. Your plea was, you voted with many other Christian men in order to do away with a greater evil than the open saloon. Where can you find a greater evil than the saloon? And then when poor Tom took to the saloon again and fell, you good Christian voters threw him out of the church for drunkenness. You helped wreck his home and send him to hell. Much comfort may you get out of the thought. The idea of you and old Dick Smart putting yourselves forward as Christian politicians! Good Lord!"

I let go my hold on his coat-tail after this burst. I knew full well if there was a defective streak in the old man's make-up it consisted in the nonsensical idea he'd got into his head that he was a first-class politician, but my efforts to eradicate this notion from his bald head had been futile so far.

"Old 'oman," he said, turning for a moment a grinning countenance on me, "don't scold, for you know I keep you supplied with a lot of fine grub. What would you do for victuals if it wern't for me?"

I retorted: "Your grub comes to me blood raw, and I have it to manipulate and cook, which more than pays for what I devour."

"Well, sugar plum, 'spose we turn Darby and Joan this year; you take to the fields and I'll go to the kitchen and do the cookin'?"

He usually sailed out of an argument of this nature on that much-abused Darby and Joan episode, the introduction of the sugar plum or some other sweet edible. I was never averse to being sugar-plummed, or candy-lumped, but I held out bravely and answered:

"I fancy your 'sugar plum' would not exist long on such food as you'd get up; besides, your aversion to soap and water settles the matter so far as I'm interested."

We both grew silent and traveled on.

Resuming my thoughts of Laura, I said to myself: "If she does marry Pete, I'll leave off having another thought or care about her welfare. I'll never again show her how to store away potatoes, bury cabbage, pickle beets or make beat biscuits. I never shall any more." I'd learned to love her as though she'd been nigh of kin, and the thought of throwing herself away on that—well, I wouldn't call names, it wasn't good form; but the consolation I drew from being the repository of so much culinary

knowledge and her not getting benefit therefrom was a great satisfaction to me.

We reached the Station as the train came in. Pete was there with the collar of his overcoat drawn up around his ears, so as to almost conceal the outlines of his face. My face gave an apprehensive thump.

Now I was never a hand to meddle, generally think my thoughts and let matters take their own course, but my interest on this occasion led me boldly to Pete's side. I caught him by the arm and asked anxiously:

"Where is Laura?"

He turned to me with a surprised and startled look: "She is safe at Smart's, I hope. I'm going back there in a moment and will look after her; she'll be going home pretty soon."

"Before this train moves out?" I queried anxiously.

"I should think not," he replied, regarding me curiously.

At this instant three city men emerged from the train, and Pete turned to them with "This way, gentlemen, if you please.'

I understood this later. The train moved out, so did we, my doubts and fears allayed for the moment, to return with unabated violence later. I had no thoughts of a particular nature to occupy my mind after Alma and the children left

me for a season. These children were not so nearly related to us as to Alma, being her own sister's offspring. They were Joe Benton and his small brother and sister. We loved them as sincerely as Alma did, yet she felt her claim on them superior to ours, and generally kept them with her. And for this reason I took Laura into my heart and perplexed and harrassed my brain over her; for it seems a woman is never content or happy until she finds something to worry over.

Nothing further transpired that winter to disturb the equanimity of my existence, as far as solicitude for Laura went. She towed Pete through Cæsar and the poets and launched him into deeper waters. Jack Winton's music lessons ceased and seemingly he was no further advanced in music than in Laura's affections, for she continually and purposely avoided him and took to Pete wonderfully, who had turned his attention absolutely to soap and water and taken as an intimate acquaintance, the hair brush and shoe polish. His mother informed me he'd grown two inches taller, and she was forced to let out the hems in his Sunday pants, and yet there was an inch wanting, and she "lowed" she'd have to hand them down to the next Grimes in size.

CHAPTER VII.

JACK'S GRAPPLE WITH THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

After March had whistled itself out of breath and fled o'er the hills and far away, when ploughing and planting time had asserted its sway, when the snow drops and butter cups had opened their eyes to the warm and genial sunshine, and the lilacs were scenting the sweet April wind, just previous to the ushering in of May, one morning Jack rode up to our yard gate, with a dash to the right, then to the left, and a plunge forward, for he was astride an unbroken colt. He generally had a colt in hand, breaking it to harness or saddle, and I calculated some day one of the colts would return the favor by breaking my friend's neck. He tied the colt and came to where I was transplanting vines by the porch pillars. Said he come to get some marrowfats to sow.

"Why, Jack," said I, "the time for sowing marrowfats has long gone by. I've quantities of other garden seeds I can give you."

"It appears," he replied with a grave face, "it appears I'm too late in most of my ventures."

"Oh, well, now," I returned, "there's no sense worrying over marrowfats; they're here and gone before you get much enjoyment out of 'em. There's enough other garden truck that stays by you till you've got your fill; that is the kind that rewards you for planting and cultivating."

He looked out across the meadows in the direction of Laura's and asked if I'd heard about her bees swarming. I had not heard it, and thought it yet early for swarming, but hoped she'd had the good fortune to save them, and presumed she had, as she relied so implicitly on Pete's judgment. I supposed he was efficient in handling them.

What I said must have touched a tender spot in the region near his heart, for he winced perceptibly, and the switch with which he'd been tapping the colt swished nervously in the air for a moment, then descending lashed the heads from three or four of my early sweet peas that I'd planted near the veranda, taking special pains to protect them at night from unfavorable winds.

"Jack Winton!" I cried, "you idiot, what are you thrashing the life out of my sweet peas for?"

He was startled by my vehemence into recovery of his wandering thoughts.

"I beg your pardon," he said, sitting down on the porch step, "I didn't know they were of any importance."

Said I hastily: "They are of as much importance to me as Laura Dane's good opinion of Jack Winton is to you."

Then I recalled instantly how long and tenderly he'd loved her, and how sore his heart must be over her indifferent manner toward him, and to mitigate the pain I had possibly given, I added:

"I think she has a great preference for you, unless you've acted in some way of late to forfeit her esteem. She's said to me, time and again, you'd been such a kind and faithful friend to them, particularly in their poverty. She's not wanting in gratitude, and no slack hand at returning kindness. She's fair and square with friend and foe."

Then, not to inspire him with too much hope, I guardedly remarked: "It is a question in my mind which is the handsomer, Laura or Norton, and if matters ended according to prediction, that would be the handsomest couple wedding bells ever jingled over. She's as fair as a June rose, and—"

He cut me short with this—

"Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flowery meads in May;
If she be not so for me,
What care I how fair she be."

Then turning to me with a showing of contempt on his face and in his tone: "You don't appear to be acquainted with all the facts in the case—that she's off with the old love and on with the new."

"Why, how now? What's happened?"

"Oh, nothing serious," he replied, growing calmer. "She's transferred her affections from Norton to—" he paused.

"Well, to whom?" I asked impatiently.

"It is needless to ask, since there's apparently only one other in the case."

"Say, now, you don't mean Pete?" And I was prepared for, "I do mean Pete, and he's so elated over her change of affection that he confined to me, or attempted to, his convictions; said he'd known it since she undertook drilling him. I said to him, as I turned away, that I preferred not to be the recipient of his confidences."

While repeating this he looked grim and contemptuous. 'Twas evident he was more jealous of Pete than he'd been of Norton.

Surely, Jack," I querried, "Pete didn't have the assurance to tell you Laura was in love with *him?*"

"Not in so many words, but he implied as much."

"Well, the dear me," I remarked, "the Mr. Peter is growing to be a high stepper indeed."

Then after a little reflection I observed: "Don't you be down-hearted, Jack; if she's fickle, she'll likely change her mind again, and in the next rebound be prepared and catch on. You might when a leisure time presents itself assist a little with her bees and through that avenue reach her affections."

"Impossible!" he replied gloomily; then laid aside his trouble under pressure of more pleasant thoughts.

"I made an effort in that direction and I wish you'd seen me—I mean I'm glad you didn't."

There was a humorous side to his nature, and he laughed outright at thought of the incident. He continued: "Early one morn in passing, that was before she gave me to understand she preferred my room to my company, I found her in the bee yard examining the ground near the hives. I asked her if any of her bees had strayed off, that I'd found a handful or more poaching in my young orchard. She replied, she'd taught them allegiance to

herself, and, like chickens, they were home to roost each night.

"The ants were troubling her bees, and she was tracing them to their burrows. Thinking to aid her in the search for the little marauders, I knelt down near a hive, when the bees resenting my invasion of their territory, began an onslaught. One caught me by the nose, another assayed to salute me with a stinging kiss on the lip; yet another, to mark me as his own, punctured my right ear. I bounded to my feet with a yell, a slap, a knock, and tore round that bee yard like a yearling colt with a tin can attachment, going all the gaits. I dashed this way and flew that, all the while belaboring my head and face with my old hat. After a good long stampede around and about, the bees all this time in full chase, I jumped over the fence and plunged headforemost into the currant hedge, from which place Laura rescued me with laughter, bearing in her hand a bottle of sweet oil with which she bathed my wounds.

" 'Oh, Mr. Winton!' she exclaimed, 'I observe you've studied gymnastics to good purpose. Had a Dancing Dervish witnessed your antics I'm sure he would have turned green with envy.' Again she laughed merrily. I threatened her with the courts if my injuries proved serious. She earnestly importuned me not to hasten pro-

ceedings, observing, 'I would make a too favorable impression on the witness stand as to injuries received, only wait till my nose and lips returned to normal conditions.'

"And thus you observe," he said, reflectively, "what headway I could make in that direction."

He went home more cheerful than he came, but he was gloomy, unhappy and suffering mental distress. I wish it were not possible that one individual had it in his or her power to make another so unhappy. "Poor Jack," I mused, "what perverse, what distressing forms affairs sometimes assume. How hard to understand or believe that all is for the best, that in the dim future the pain we now suffer will cease to ache; the present gaping wounds cease to bleed; in part seared over and forgotten in the daily routine and pressure of compulsory activity that many of us are forced to undergo. Yet, perhaps, this compelling activity is far better, forcing our minds into less disturbing channels. Ah, well, who knows, but the Heavenly Father."

Thus I reflected and for the moment sincerely wished she might marry Peter or Norton, one or the other, I wasn't particular which right then, so that Jack might settle composedly down to farming and colt training and be happy as he once was. Now here he was in a continual state of turmoil and discomfort, his feelings con-

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stantly torn and lacerated, splintered, so to speak, till his heart was unfit for anything I could think of except stove kindlings. As for me, in my sympathy for Jack and my interest in Laura, I had allowed my mind to become distorted and altogether unshapely as never before. And, seemingly, all the while Jack and I were troubling, she was pursuing the even tenor of her way, calm and placid as September moonshine; and I said to myself, forgetting my espousal of Norton's cause, "If I had the disposal of her, I should put her into harness right along with Jack, and have Pete and Norton apprenticed to some good trade and get my mind relieved. I should rejoice when Alma's time of teaching was over, when she and the kids should come home once more; then I should not be continually chattering to myself in such an idiotic way.

CHAPTER VIII.

A ROUND UP AND A QUARREL.

Immediately after this I went over to see Bettie Grimes, Pete's mother, went for some geranium slips Pete had offered to give me. He cultivated many flowers of various hues, and usually of late you would find a flower pinned on the lapel of his coat.

Bettie was a cheery, industrious little soul, with nine repetitions of Barney Grimes to darn, patch and switch. Barney also kept the Station boarding house, and it was not to be wondered over that the five youngest scions were usually in a tangle-headed, mud-besmeared state. Wonderful children to make mud pies and cakes and run a boarding house. The two eldest girls were married.

It was Bettie's invariable practice, when she had visitors, to have a round-up, for ablutionary and other purposes, which the children were not inclined to accept with any show of avidity, so Bettie was forced to chase about mightily before she could effect a huddle; but when she

succeeded, it is safe to say the reckoning was not doled out sparingly. The chastisement on these occasions, administered by hand on that portion of the anatomy set apart for this especial purpose, was severe, but quickly over with; what was lost in quantity was made up in quality, and she displayed so much tact and ingenuity in her round-ups, that I could but believe she'd missed her calling when she married Barney instead of taking to the plains on a broncho. We spent the afternoon rather pleasantly, taking into consideration the uproar, for the scrubbing and grooming went forward unabatedly, with an occasional box on the ear for little Mike or Norah, or a twist to the right or turn to the left of one or the other of the cherubim. Mike, the youngest, kept up a continual wail, that would have done creditable service at an Irish wake.

Bettie acknowledged she'd been unusually busy of late. A lot of men, oil prospectors from the city, had been stopping with them, she said, and that Mr. Norton was among the number. He'd been to see Miss Laura. She was of opinion Miss Laura gave him some encouragement or he wouldn't be such a frequent visitor there. She'd seen them out driving the evening before, though there was very little talk right now of a wedding.

"I conclude," I remarked, "her mind is entirely absorbed in caring for her bees."

"I dunno," she replied, "her mind run out after her night school in just the same way, and she seemed determined to pull thru' by makin' herself useful ev'er way she can, and she's altogether the darlin'est body I ever met. Pete he fairly worships her, which is not surprisin', since she's winnowed all the laze'ness out of him, and spurred him up so wonderful in book knowledge. Now he's happy in the thought of makin' a stir in the world."

She said, furthermore, she "lowed he aimed to turn his mind to law, though he'd never said as much; but he had two uncles across the ocean who were parlyment men." She was perfectly satisfied in her mind that Pete would some day set the world ablaze.

The subject of our conversation at this moment came whistling in from Laura's bee yard, whistling Annie Laurie, too, with very telling effect, for we hushed our chat to listen, while the children rushed to the door to meet him, little Mike putting off his grief under pressure of more interesting entertainment. Pete caught and tossed him high in the air; as he came down with a nervous shriek, somewhat alarmed, I rose from my chair. Seeing me, Pete came forward with a kind and polite greeting, and gave

such indications of being pleased to meet me, that I could but observe the improvement in his manner and general appearance, which impressed me favorably; and when we went for the flowers he was careful to show me all his new plants and explained what cultivation they required for perfect rearing of each, giving me a slip from this and that well-grown plant.

"How is Mrs. Dane getting on?" I asked.

"Improving right along."

"And Laura?"

"The sweetest flower that blows."

He was fine at rounding up compliments.

"Norton has been to see her again I hear."

"Yes," he answered slowly, "that is one of his reasons for coming."

"Are there other reasons?"

"Do you not know?" looking at me in a questioning way.

"Can't say that I do."

"He comes here with his associates to carry on that accursed drinking and gambling. I've tried to get father to forbid him the house, and some day he'll regret not heeding me."

"Does Laura know this?" I asked.

"I told her of it, and then took a special sneaking, underhand way of bringing her face

to face with the facts. You remember,'' he continued, ''the night of the Smart wedding seeing me conduct three men here from the Station?''

''Yes.''

''They were Norton's associates. He asked me to look after some friends of his and see they were safely lodged at father's. I knew their intention and talked with Miss Laura about it, but she appeared unbelieving or indifferent then; but now—'' he hesitated a moment, then, ''Yes, they were gamblers and proceeded to business immediately on arrival. They were in the office and I managed to leave one of the window shutters ajar so that I might open it without noise. Then I ran across to Miss Laura's and told her mother wished to see her right away, which was quite true, for mother is never free of that desire. She'd been home a short while and was reciting to her mother the laughable incidents of the evening; but she rose right up and came with me without a question. When we got opposite the office window I drew her near it and noislessly pulled the shutter back. What she saw was four men seated at a table on which were bottles containing wine, and Norton shuffling a pack of gambling cards. She turned away and covered her face with her hands, saying not a word. I pushed the shutter to, took her hands from her

face and led her back home. When we reached her door she looked at me not unkindly and remarked, 'I have known it always.' I felt badly over what I had done, but she had appeared so indifferent when I'd tell her what Norton was up to, I feared she didn't credit the truth of what I said. Then another fear assailed me, I feared she might misinterpret my motive in telling her. Poor Norton, he's going to the devil as rapidly as time can carry him, with no restraining hand but Laura's. His mother and sister are no check on him, for he learned to drink and play cards around his own fireside. Progressive euchre is what worked his ruin; I've heard all about it."

My mind reverted to what he'd said just previous to his last remark, and I returned to that.

"What was your motive, Pete in telling her?"

"You wouldn't have had me stand tamely by and see her imperil her future happiness by marrying such a man as Norton, would you?"

"True," I replied, "I should have had my anxieties, yet at the same time I should have felt as though I were meddling."

"Indeed, I felt just so," he returned, "till later seeing my embarrassment, she set my mind

at rest by telling me she knew I meant in all kindness what I did. However, after all my trouble, I found I was on the wrong trail," and he dug vigorously after a hyacinth bulb with his knife.

"You don't mean she's broken with him?" I asked more and more interested.

"Oh, no," he replied, "and she never will. It is evident she is more apprehensive of danger to him than herself. He is growing more reckless daily, and now that his father has restricted him in finances, she fears trouble for him.

"Well," I remarked dryly, "it appears to me, Peter, you are taking uncommon interest in Laura's affairs."

"Why should I not?" he questioned. "Only think what she has done for me. You know what a good-for-nothing I was before she took charge of me. Why," said he, "the timber father has consumed to turn me to account would have been a fortune to some man a hundred years hence. I was adrift, without compass or chart, lost, miserable, knowing not which course to pursue. She found me, directed me into calm blue waters, and now I know precisely what I mean my future shall be."

"And," I replied, "you aim to make a worthy object of yourself for her sweet sake. Do you

think you can attain that standard of excellence that will be well pleasing in her eye?"

He shot a sharp glance at me, pondered a moment, then laughed a good-natured laugh, and replied, as he gouged up a carnation root and handed it to me:

"I mean to recompense her for what she has done for me; I know of a way I can do that, God bless her."

"Oh, yes, I understand," said I, "instead of bee culture you will turn your mind to heart culture."

"Just so," he answered, "and since the cultivation is so *very far* advanced, my task will be an easy one."

He invested his insinuation with so much importance and impudence, which implied I couldn't help but understand that he was the favored suitor, he put such particular stress on certain words, and then looks go a long way in making convictions.

"Well, to be brief about it," I returned, "she's not so fastidious about being pleased, in certain directions, as I inferred she'd be."

"Indeed you mistake," he replied, "for it takes the best fellow in all the world to come up to her ideal."

"And I dare say *you think you are that kind of a fellow,*" I punctuated.

He looked me directly in the eye and answered, slowly, seriously: "A fellow can make anything of himself he wishes, be it vilest or best. You don't deserve much credit for penetration or discernment."

I didn't accept that last as a compliment to the acuteness of my perception, and I became just a little nettled and replied in no good terms: "See here, Pete, I fear your heart is overreaching your heels in a matter of weight; if it expands a mite more you'll not be able to proceed on life's highway."

"To be more brief, I've got the big-head?" he questioned.

"I didn't say it."

"You implied it."

"Well, I'm fixed and unshaken in my mind that Laura is easily pleased in——" I hesitated.

"In what?" looking at my disturbed countenance. "Well, I'll swing, if I don't believe we are about to quarrel; suppose we part while we are friends, but do this: Adorn your head with a studying cap instead of a night cap when you retire, and see if you cannot reach some pleasanter conclusion." Off he started at a

brisk stride. "Oh river," he called back, waving his hand.

Now to my certain knowledge there was not a river nearer than five miles of us, so I concluded he'd seek Laura's companionship instead of walking five miles in search of a river.

I picked up my plants and returned home, too ill-mannered to leave my thanks with his mother.

CHAPTER IX.

AMERICA AND IRELAND IN COMBAT.

I found sufficient material for my mind to operate upon when I reached home, or pretty soon thereafter, so Pete's injunction about the adornment of the head was cast aside under pressure of more strenuous proceedings.

I found old man Spindle perched high up on the gate post watching Dennis Grimes and Kenner Dane playing marbles out in the road. I had hardly noticed Dennis' absence from the round-up; one or more missing from a flock of that size is hardly perceptible.

I sat me down on the stiles near Old Man, thinking to have a nice conjugal chat about our own home affairs. He informed me he'd heard of a nice girl across in the "sang diggin's," as 'twas called, whom he could employ to help me when harvest time came, which was then not far distant. I was truly pleased at this information, and blessed Old Man down in the innermost recess of my heart for his thoughtfulness of my comfort and needs. Drawing nearer him, I laid my arm caressingly about his shoulders.

He asked if I had observed how Dennis was rigged out. Well, sure enough, his style of attire was a little forced, I discovered.

It was Kenner's birthday, with a birthday dinner accompaniment, and to show due respect to the occasion of an invitation to dine out, Dennis had donned a long-laid-aside long-tailed old white linen duster of Pete's, which struck him somewhere in the neighborhood of the hocks, bare-footed, a clean shirt on, with a strip of red calico, in lieu of a necktie, adorning his collar. The shirt was inside out, and the necktie dangling awry. Kenner was also attired in his Sundays.

Well, there they were, seemingly as happy and loving as lambs, with no thought of a rupture coming. They were great friends, with one year's difference in age; Dennis claimed that, but yielded to Kenner in all things.

Dennis was a stout, sturdy little lad, kind to a fault, with a slight propensity for fighting, handed down by his ancestry from away back, along with other attributes, but no one ever anticipated a pugilistic encounter between him and Kenner.

Old Man and I chatted on harmoniously concerning family affairs and particularly about the girl he was to hire for my benefit. Present-

ly I heard Dennis say: "Hurry up wid de ring, Kinny; I got'r go home and drive up de cows."

"Wait a little minit, Denny, and I'll have'r all right." Yet he knelt there in the dust and marked off that ring a half dozen times, each time erasing it, not being satisfied as to the correct look of it. Finally Dennis, in his impatience, stepped behind Kenner and with his foot set him over on his nose in the dust. And really I don't believe a whole nest full of hornets aflame with anger, on the war path, could have emitted more venom than that little Kenner Dane displayed. He rose kicking. His right foot flew out, hot, fast, furious and repeatedly. Dennis took it calmly at first, with a good-natured grin, but finally began dodging this way and that to avoid his assailant, who seemed momentarily to grow more angry. Finally in the vortex of excitement the heel of Kenner's shoe caught in a pocket of the old duster and held firmly. As Dennis moved here and there, Kenner was compelled to hop round after him on one foot, for the shoe heel determinedly refused to relinquish its hold. With a last and resolute effort at disentanglement, Kenner gave a wrench that started a rent in the pocket, and before you could wink or think, he snatched that duster tail out by the roots.

"Land sakes, go at 'em and stay the racket," I commanded the old man.

"Let 'em fight it out; give 'em a chance to prove who is who," said he, grinning.

"No, I don't, neither," said I, and I rose quickly and started for the battleground, but the old man caught me by the left arm and with a quick movement, he landed me back on the stile.

"You old barbarian!" I exclaimed, and turning round I gave him a shove that sent him spinning from his high perch into the yard. As he tumbled over I continued: "I can give you all the fight you want, but nothing to what you need." He scrambled quickly to his feet grinning, though that last move was an unlooked-for incident.

I hastened to the seat of action in time to save slaughter. Both boys were down in the dust, Kenner scratching and clawing as best he could, for Dennis had him hugged up in a close embrace to prevent further blows. He relaxed his hold, however, as I advanced, and by a quick, dextrous movement, Kenner whirled over and had him by the hair with one hand, while with the other he meant to do a little pounding, but I saved him the pleasure.

"Go it, Ameriky!" squalled the old man from his high perch to which he'd returned. "I

knowed Ameriky would come out with colors floatin'; Haw! haw!"

My fingers itched to get at him again, but I was occupied with more interesting matter. As I lifted Kenner to his feet I asked severely, Kenner, who learned you to fight?"

"Nobody, I knowed it," he screamed, as he gave vent to the most tremendous howl I thought I ever heard. I was fearful his mother would hear him away over on the other side of the railroad track, so I clamped my hand over his mouth and lifting him in my arms, bore him to the back porch, where I proceeded to wash the dust from his face.

Dennis followed with a much-scratched countenance and a red eye, the duster tail fetching up the rear, for it clung by a thread or two on each side in filial affection to the parent trunk from which it had been ruthlessly severed.

"Is you hurt, Kinny?" he asked in a sorrowful tone while the big tears tumbled out from his eyes, forming a small cascade.

"Yes, and I am hurt, and you hurt me, too, and I'll tell Pete and Laura, too," he sobbed.

"I didn't go for to hurt, you Kinny; don't tell."

"Yes I will, too, and you're meaner 'n a dog."

"Dennis in his impatience stepped behind Kenner and with his foot set him over on his nose"—Page 78

"You're meaner'n two dogs if you tells on me, 'cause you hurt me the most and tored Pete's duster, and—and—don't tell, Kinny."

"Yes I will, too, and tell your pap you went in the pond swimmin', too."

"No, don't tell, don't tell, Kinny, 'cause I didn't swim, I waded in no deeper than me knees and down."

Says Kenner irate: "Anybody can see you put on your shirt upside in when you come out the pond."

Dennis turned the red eye and the blue eye down on the bosom of the "upside in" garment, and I wondered how he would manage such convincing evidence. Without hesitation he explained: "Yes, I 'member I got me shirt turned when we was climin' ober de bob-wire fence, and ef ye won't tell I bumped yer nose nor nuthin', I'll gib yer de big blue mobble what Mr. Norton gib me."

He went down into his pocket and brought to light the big blue "mobble," a sure beauty. He looked longingly, lovingly at it, then proffered it to Kenner, who put out quickly a hand to grasp it.

"Now, Kinney, ye won't tell nuthin', will ye?"

"No I won't," says Kenner, beginning to smile. "No, I won't tell nuthin' 'tall."

But no sooner had Kenner got the blue treasure in his possession, than Dennis raised an agonizing howl that far outdid Kenner's yell in volume, pitch and excess. The bawl of a six month's weaning calf was nothing in comparison. The surrender of the blue marble was more than human endurance could calmly undergo.

Old Man came bolting round the corner of the house—"Hi! Hi! ain't it done with yet?"

"No," said I, "but you could have squshed it in the outset if you'd had a mind to."

"Come, come, Dennis," he said persuasively, "you'll alarm the natives, wake snakes and skeer the old Nick."

"He's got my mobble!" bawled Dennis.

"Who, the old Nick?" questioned Old Man. Whereupon Kenner, thinking it a personal allusion, set up a fresh bout of yelps, and the welkin rang again and again in response.

"The good Lord have mercy on us and deliver us, if they are the means of bringing about an earthquake," was my ardent prayer, which was answered on the moment, for looking up I saw Laura skimming across the meadow like a swallow on the wing, coming in our direction. She bounded over the stiles and in a moment was with us.

Old Man didn't wait for questions, but proceeded with: "The boys have had a reg'lar festive time of it—a Sunday-school picnic and so on."

"Is either hurt?" she asked quietly, looking questioningly from one to the other.

Kenner bore no marks of the conflict, but the dilapidated condition of Dennis' face and the sorry plight of the old duster spoke volumes.

She went to him and putting her arms about his little body she draw him kindly and lovingly to her side.

"How did it happen, Dennis? Tell me all about it," she said soothingly. The mutiny was quelled when she came to the scene, but the sobbing and snuffling was unabated.

"I dru-uth-er be flogged 'an to giv-ive up my blue mob-ble, wudn't you-u, Miss Laura?"

"That depends, but you tell me how it happened, Denny," and drawing a handkerchief from her neat white apron pocket, she wiped the dust and tear stains from his face and kissed him. This seemed only to augment his grief, but she kept on soothing and encouraging, till she got the truth from him.

We each, Old Man and I, essayed to explain, but she didn't heed us, went quietly on talking to Dennis, as though it were a small matter of

every-day occurrence, and they were the only two interested.

Kenner stood listening soberly to the talk, for really he had no grievance.

Said Dennis: "Me and Kinny was playin' mobbles and he wouldn't ring up, 'cause I had to go fur de cows, and I tipped him ober in de road, but he didn't have fur to go, 'cause he was on his squatters, and I didn't go for to hu't 'im, 'n' he kicked me 'nd scratched 'n' tore Pete's duster, 'n'—"

"Now you've gone an' tole yourse'f," says Kenner. "An' he went in the pon', too, an'—an'—"

"Now you gimme my mobble, 'cause you promised not to tell de pon' bizness, you han' 'er right up."

I feared another outbreak, but it didn't materialize, for Laura settled it in this wise, speaking to Kenner:

"However wrong, dear, Dennis' act of disobedience may have been, you forfeited your claim on the marble when you broke your promise to him, and you must return it."

Kenner began whimpering, as he passed the marble over to Dennis.

"If your heart is so set on owning a blue marble, I will speak to Mr. Norton about it,

and I'm sure he'll find one for you. Now as to the duster, if Dennis will promise me—" she was drawing the duster off—"promise me not to *ever, ever* go in the pond again unless Pete is with him, I will carry it home with me and mend *every rent in it*, and 'twill be good as new. What say you, Dennis?"

"Miss Laura, I'll promise you that on my word an' nonner, I never will. Amen."

She took the old duster and holding it up to view said it looked like the tail end of a tornado, and her voice floated out in a merry peal of laughter. Old Man laughed uproariously, joining in the effort to bring about a reconciliation between the boys.

"Denny, you and Kinny behold this old buzzard with his tail feathers gone." She flirted and flopped the old duster up and down in the evening breeze again and again.

Both boys joined the merriment.

"Look, Denny! Look!" exclaimed Kenner.

"I see," said Dennis, chuckling, "it beats the skars and skripes in a blowout. Watch 'er! Watch 'er, Kinny."

"Hooraw for the old duster!" bawled Old Man; "Miss Laura has turned it into a truce flag."

"Oh, but I got ter go for dem ol' cows," said Dennis, lugubriously. "Come on, Kinny, w'll

fin' 'em at de bars." Off he trotted, Kenner following.

"Did you ever?" I remarked, turning to Laura after the boys were out of sight. She and Old Man were yet laughing over the duster.

"Ever what?" she asked.

"W'y them boys; I never dreamed of them fighting."

"They didn't fight. True, Dennis pushed Kenner over, but with no intention of hurting him, I'm sure."

"I told her so, and—" attempted Old man, but I interrupted with, "No you didn't neither."

"Well, I aimed to if you'd given me the chance. Miss Laura, I mean to sue for a divorce on the grounds of salt and batter; she knocked me down and then scudded away before I'd had time to wring her nose."

"Don't heed what he says, Laura," I remarked solemnly, "for he's a poor, weak-minded old critter, and sometimes hardly knows whether he's on his head or his heels."

"I do know that half an hour ago, with your help, I turned a summersault from the gatepost and landed on my head."

I joined in the laugh this time, though reluctantly.

"The affair seems to have taken a pleasant turn all round, so I will hie myself home. Come soon," and kissing me adieu, Laura fled homeward across the meadow, but ere she reached the furtherest stile I saw Pete join her and they walked onward in the gloaming. I turned and walked into the house, thinking "this might appropriately be called children's day." But the contretemps (country tramps, Old Man calls it) did not take place till the following summer.

CHAPTER X.

TINY MIGGLES.

Old Man went over to the "diggins," found the girl and brought her in. A capable, nice girl I found her, named Tiny Miggles, though I was fully persuaded in my mind it should have been Tiny Giggles, for she was the gigglingest piece of human flesh it was ever my lot to fall in with.

I am a great admirer of good nature, and all that, but she so far outdid good nature that I was oftentimes compelled to repress her overflow of good humor by showing my disapproval, or by quoting to her what the preacher says about the "cracking of thorns under a pot." No matter what happened, whether of a serious nature or not, she felt it her bounden duty to giggle, and the most thorough chatterbox I had ever met with. When she was not giggling she was pelting my weary ears with chatter about folks over in the "diggins," whom I neither knew or cared to know, but she finally got my interest excited over one Jim Shanks.

Tiny was a lone little waif, homeless, with no relative except a decrepit old uncle; a good part of her life had been spent with the Shanks family, and the first two weeks of her stay with me, there was not an hour through the day she did not contrive to introduce Jim Shanks into our conversation, so I reached the conclusion that Jim Shanks was master fiddler, could split more rails, hop higher and run farther without being pushed for wind than any other fellow in the "diggins," and occupied for the time being, at least, the highest in Tiny's affections.

She was a bright, cheerful, neat little girl of sixteen, and I presumed from her discourse, she'd made a lasting impression on Jim's heart, and found my conjecture was correct later on.

She was quite capable of receiving instruction, and I found it no trouble to drill her in household matters; she took right hold and was trustworthy.

Just before Tiny came, Old Man hired Skipworth Sparks to assist with the farm work. Not for the reason that Skip was an extra farm hand, but simply because we could not do better. Skip's mind didn't reach out much in the direction of work, but was filled with tom-foolery and far-fetched notions, thought he was born to fill a higher sphere than the one fate, or circumstances, had thrust on him; full of vain,

egotistical ideas, very aspiring, though there was no particular harm in the last-named article, if he had not allowed his aspirations to scare off what little good sense he did possess. And he felt as distinguished over harboring these high-flung ideas as if he'd already reached the top rung of the ladder on which he was climbing to whatever it was he was aiming at.

He read many books, especially those beyond his grasp, and was well assured that in an educational point of view, his tow-head held more knowledge than any other around Grimes' Station.

I could not be brought to see any superiority, but believed him ahead of most fellows in triflingness.

To be sure, his Sunday clothes were fashionable and fitted his person extremely well, and he wore high-colored neckties, which shed a kind of halo, or nimbus, about his naturally swart features, but, dear me! fine clothes count for nothing if the heart is not right, and Skip's heart was awry. He had a meager, unfinished looking little nose, too, that showed a settled determination to climb up at the point, and carry the upper lip with it; for this reason it cost him considerable effort to keep his mouth shut. On that same upper lip, by close inspection, could be found a pale, poverty-struck mus-

tache that required much time and devotion to cultivate, and though there was a striking, nigh-of-kin look between his tow head and that mustache, he was not pleased that nature had not given it a darker tint, and to frustrate nature's designs, he bought a box of mustache paint and used it, which gave him a very stagey look. However, after a few times' use his upper lip began swelling and became inflamed; his mouth took on a dreadful look, so out of proportion. I told him I dare be bound the paint was rank poison, and I thought it judicious he should make his will at once, and be sure he was ready to meet death at a moment's notice. He scared off from the paint, grew humble and meek, till his lip shrank to normal proportion, then foolish ideas got him again.

Tiny was dazed, especially by his appearance when he'd rig up and attach himself to a heavy watch chain, that at every move would send forth a clanging chime of music.

One Sabbath morn, as we were preparing for church, I heard him ask if she had any objections to him as an escort. She was all of a flutter, and went off into a series of giggles that threatened to be the last of her; but she pulled safely through and answered, "Yes;" then she giggled again and said "No," but finally set-

tled down on "yes," which seemed satisfactory to both.

She was very much pleased over his attentions, and the following week I found her often in a contemplative mood, before the looking glass, much oftener than was necessary to the perfect carrying out of her household duties. There was also a marked neglect in the mention of Jim Shanks.

She and Skip got on quite social terms, and after the day's labor was ended, they sat on the front porch and held friendly intercourse. His talk bordered on the political, and she confessed to having a great fondness for "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," "The boy stood on the burning deck," and all such. He informed her that was all silly stuff, that she should read more advanced literature, and referred her to Byron, Dickens and Shakespeare.

"Bryunt, Diggins and Shakeskeer," she repeated; "I'll read 'em."

He continued, telling her there was nothing like poetry—"it was so elevatin' to the mind, and soul-liftin' to the soul, and to him was the meat and bread of existence."

After reflecting for a moment she replied: "I know I'd get awful hongry ef there weren't nuthin' to eat but poetry."

That was because she was not of a poetical turn of mind, he argued, casting a scornful glance in her direction, of which she was not observant.

He dwelt lengthily upon the advantages to be derived from having the gift of poetry born within one. His high-flown language seemed to strike her with wonder and admiration, and she asked innocently: "Skip, have you got the gift of po'try in you, and can you make it fitten to reead?"

In a very bombastic tone he replied: "I should think I have, and I mean to write a book full of it and set it afloat."

Tiny reflected again, then giggled and asked "how long he s'posed 'twould float?"

He grew angry at her reflection, and 'twas three evenings before she cajoled him into a pleasant humor.

She was an uncommonly pliable little creature, and strove to please, and I found her after this often poring over a book. Frequently, too, she was scribbling with pen and pencil.

However, one Sunday, there came a circumstance that marred the harmony of their pleasant intercourse, and had a wet-blanket effect on Skip's ardor. That circumstance was Jim Shanks. Jim was a big, awkward, uncouth-

looking youngster, unaccustomed to lingering in the society of the elite, consequently his manner was very striking. He had a lot of trouble with his feet and hands, and seemed as if he'd been happy but for these unruly appendages, that wouldn't remain a moment where he'd place them. His clothes fell short of the most approved style. His coat had passed the prime of life, his pants away yonder too short; in fact, he looked as though some one had caught him by the heels and jerked him about three inches too far through those pantaloons; but I concluded instantly that he was an encouraging young man, and had prolonged the life of that outfit by preserving it for Sunday's use alone. He had a frank, honest eye, that bespoke a trustworthy nature, and I found later in the day, after he'd got composed, that he had fine common sense, and it's the common, good, every-day-sense people, after all, who are the backbone of the world, clothes or no clothes.

When Jim came, Skip, I found, was more interested that I imagined, for he grew jealous and took refuge in hurt feeling and the top of the woodshed, where he remained all day, whittling and chewing the cud of bitter reflection, along with his tobacco. A terrible fellow to chew and whittle, I usually kept a few splints we used for kindlings, lying promiscuously

around in order to save the window sills, door facings and porch railing from that ruthless knife of his.

When Jim left he seemed not to be in the most blissful state of mind, but returned the following week, his plea being to inform Tiny her Uncle Gid was ailing. Ever after this he made Uncle Gid's health an excuse for his visits. Uncle Gid Miggles was all the known relation Tiny had; her father and mother having died when she was but a slip of a babe, and she'd been left on the cold charity of the world. Knowing this, I often wondered over her lighthearted manner, for she'd had a tough fight in her childhood—shuffled and flung from hand to hand as she was, till Uncle Gid returned from no one knew whence,, where he had been wandering for many years, came back to find kith and kin all dead, or gone, save poor little Tiny. He gave her to Jim Shanks' mother, took up his abode near by, and when Tiny got old enough, she kept his house tidied up and his clothes neat; but he would not allow her to live with him. Sometimes he'd lock up his cabin and go away for six months, then return and take up his lonely life again.

When Jim made his second visit, Skip had another bout of the sulks. He was whimsical as a spoiled child, anyway, and had just suf-

ficiently recovered from the former visit to lend Tiny a photograph he had made as soon as the old man paid him his first month's wages. He carried that photo around in his pocket for one solid month, and I'd seen him sneak it out at times and gaze rapturously upon it, till I know all the lineaments must have been firmly fixed in his mind's eye, and, considering the adoration he had for it, 'twas surprising he could part from it an hour.

One morning I was searching for a darning needle and came across this same picture and a poetic rhapsody, which I concluded was the outcome of the scribbling with which I had seen Tiny occupied, in the endeavor to emulate Skip, I concluded. It ran thus, in this style:

"LINES ON TO S. S.

The moon is shining very bright
  The stars is twinklin' too
While I set here and gaiz on them
  And think dear Skip ov you

"i used to thought i love Jim Shanks
  And fum him c'uldn't part
But sence I come acrost of you
  He have slid clean out'n my hart.

"i dreams ov you both nite an' day
You is foremost in my thorts
An' when you fum my presence gose
i feel all out'n sorts

"Your voice is like the turkle doves
That warbles in the bowers
Or like the bizzy bumble bee
That bumbles in the flowers

"Your hair's like the thissle down
that floats upon the air
Your eyes is like two beauty brights
Your nose is small and spar

"You is the star that gydes me out
On life's tempeschus sea,
You is the unly one i loves
Oh Skip, my Skip, Skip-ee."

I was dumb-struck when I ran upon these lines, and had to peruse them twice or thrice before I could make up my mind what to think first. It was poetry, at least in length, breadth and thickness. I was fully persuaded in my mind that Skip couldn't have hit it off nicer. It was smooth and well flowing, and you might have set it to a common metre tune and 'twould have fitted, but was it truth? had she really

let Jim slide from her heart? When I reflected over it, I must confess she fell about five feet in my estimation, for I felt Skip was unworthy of such affection as she seemed prone to lavish on him, and I made up my mind at once I would sanction no such arrangement under my roof. If Jim was not habited in store clothes, he was honest and true. All that forenoon I felt cross over the matter. I spoke harsh to Tiny, and put her on double duty, and let the love I had nurtured in my heart for her grow hard and pitiless. I began wondering if I could not do the work myself and return her to the bosom of the "diggins." I locked up all the blank paper, pens and pencils and put them under lock and key, thinking if she was sufficiently silly to entertain such sentiments she should not make a record of them.

CHAPTER XI.

NAN HOLLIS.

I was yet allowing my mind to be vexed over this when Nan Hollis, Judge Hollis' daughter from L———, burst in upon my meditations like a small tornado. She set to flight my intentions concerning Tiny, for when Nan Hollis put in an appearance, it meant a realization of something undreamed of. Three years before this, just when she had turned into her teens, her father and mother had sent her down to board with us while they were from home, and the charge of her was no small responsibility, for she was the the flightiest, torn-downest creature on topside of dirt, and kept my mind in a tempest the entire six weeks she remained with us—climbing trees, tearing her dresses, riding the young horses and so on. One day when the hands were hauling the hay in from the fields, she insisted till Old Man finally yielded in allowing her to drive into the barn with one load from the meadows, when she got one load in she hung on to the team of mules till the whole crop was housed. There was not a hen's

nest in the hay-loft she did not nose up, making a daily round of collecting eggs. She did the churning also, and once a week she jumped into the cart behind old sorrel and drove round to the grocery with the butter and eggs, returning with the proceeds of her negotiations. She went at everything with a vim, whether work or play. One day an idea caught her to take the twins and little Patsy, their colored nurse, and all have a pleasure excursion across the horse pond in the big wash-tub. The twins were five years old, Patsy eight. She did not acquaint me with her intentions, but rolled the tub to the edge of the water and stowed the children therein. She was to launch her boat with a pole and jump in before they got very far from land She launched but made a miscount as to distance, sprang out and landed kerchug, into about two or three feet of water. Clutching at the tub when she alighted, she whirled it bottom side up and flopped the children, bag and baggage, all out into the pond.

I was engaged about dinner when the alarm was raised, but rushed out, expecting some direful calamity had befallen some one. Getting nearer, I saw they were all alive and kicking. Nan had Curtis and Connie in her arms pulling for the shore, Patsy clinging to her, while old Shag, Joe Benton's Newfoundland, was plash-

ing round in the water. All three of the small children were screaming their utmost. The farm hands from all quarters rushed to the rescue, the old man and Joe Benton leading, the darkies—Uncle Tobe, his wife Croney, and their boys, Tim and Jupe, following.

When I reached the spot, Nan had landed her cargo and Aunt Crony was striving to quiet Connie's wailing.

"Dar, dar, now, hush now, mammy won't let nuffin' hurt de baby no mo'; mammy's honey candy baby."

Curtis ran to me whimpering. He could work more misery and discomfort into his whimpers than any youngster I had ever dealt with.

"Oh, we's grounded! We's grounded!" he cried. "Me an' Connie bof! Poor 'ittle chilluns! I'se mos' dead, take me home, aunty, and gim'e some sugar." Sobbing, he nestled his wet curls against my bosom. Patsy was waving her arms wildly in the air and dancing about Aunt Crony, howling with fright: "I didn't do it, it wasn't me! Yow! yow! I tole Miss Nan not to go in dar, we'd upsot, yow! yow! yow! I knowed it better as anybody. I done try it and gran'pap have to fish me out. Yup! yup!"

Says Uncle Tobe, in tones not to be misunderstood: "Patsy, you shot up dat yellin', you big

mouf nigger you; you's 'nuf to skar de debil er howlin'; fust thing you knows you's gwinter wish mighty hard you's somewhars else. You hear me, Pats Hartly? You better shot up dat yellin' 'fore I chops yer head off wid dis here hoe.'' He made at her with his hoe raised.

''I'se gwinter hush—now ise done—done hush up—yup—pup—.'' She shied behind Nan, who had rushed between them screaming: '''Oh! Uncle Tobe, don't chop her to pieces! I was to blame; I thought we'd have a nice ride and land safely on—''

''The bottom of the pond,'' laughed Joe Benton, and in his glee he fell down and rolled over.

Nan's eyes flashed; she looked to see if the children were safe, made a dash at Joe, as best she could for her dangling wet raiment, clinched one hand in his hair, with the other she pounded him soft. Joe accepted the blows with many ''ohs'' and ''ouches,'' finally getting away, the worse for the encounter. I got the excursionists to the house and clothed in dry apparel with nothing serious resulting; though Nan was much subdued in spirits and wandered off to the orchard alone to stuff green apples. I observed she found green apples a panacea for all her woes.

Soon after this she returned home, with barely a respectable dress to travel in. A week or so

later she wrote me a long, affectionate letter, saying she'd replenished her wardrobe, and sent all her much-abused toggery to the orphans' home, save the dress she took her excursion in; she kept that as a memento of the time she flogged Joe Benton with such telling effect.

And now, here she was again, a well-grown girl, and far more capable of getting herself and others into trouble. And as I previously remarked, she burst in upon my meditations like a small tornado, her hat swinging from one arm and about a yard of her dress skirt trailing behind, where she'd torn it from the waist. She made a dash for me, and with a rapturous hug or two, she exclaimed, breathing hard as though she'd been running:

"You dear, precious old flurry-worry, how glad I am to see you again. I've run myself almost out of breath! You didn't know I was coming, so as a matter of course, I had to walk from the station. I took the path across the fields, and when I got about half way through Squire Hartley's meadow, hearing a peculiar noise, I glanced back and saw the Squire's big red cow coming in my direction, with his head down, mumbling to himself in an ugly undertone. I darted off at the greatest speed I could make, reaching the cross fence, I climbed up to the top rail and without a waver in my mind

tumbled right over into a bed of briars and brambles; somehow my dress caught, and I left the greater part of it on the top rail."

"Do sit down," I cried, "you do make me so nervous, I feel just like I was going to fly all to splinters."

Down she dropped on a chair, continuing in explanation of her presence:

"You see Daddy is off on a business tour; but before he left he had me write and ask you could I remain with you in their absence, for mother accompanied him. If such arrangement was satisfactory I was to understand as much by your silence; if, on the contrary, you could not take me, you were to write."

"I got no communication from you, or you'd not be here," I said, smiling into her bright, flushed face.

"Oh, I understood as much," she went on glibly, "so after reading my letter to Daddy, and just previous to starting out to post it, I burned it. You see I feared you might be treasuring up a few recollections of the past, and refuse me shelter in my loneliness. Oh dear, how nice to get back to old friends," patting on the head old Shag, who had followed her into the house, and stood by her side wagging his tail in friendly greeting.

"I'm almost a grown young lady now, and more dextrous at climbing and driving; and I'm sure I could manage a craft with more skill than formerly. I regret Joe's absence, as my pugilistic abilities are much augmented by my three years' growth."

She laughed joyously. "I'm a fixture for a month at least," she continued, "and you had as well send over to the station for my trunk and accept me as philosophically as you can." With this, she threw her hat on a table, drew her torn skirt around, pinned the rent together and made herself at home.

After Nan had been with us a few days, and Alma not being home, and that poetry still nagging me, I was constrained by unmingled worry over it, to confide to her Tinie's story, and the state of affairs 'twixt her, Jim and Skip. She listened to my recital but said not a word, yet a merry twinkle flashed from her bright eye, and I could see mischief brewing. After this she donned her most bewitching attire, and I could see she was planning for a siege. It was, "Mr. Skip, don't you agree with me" about thus and so, and "Mr. Sparks" this and "Mr. Sparks" that, and "Mr. Sparks, will you be so kind as to favor me in some way or other." It was not three days till she had him on stilts with his head up in the air; he would not even

vouchsafe to Tiny a kind word, snubbed her without mercy, casting only a one-cornered glance in her direction when it was impossible to throw it otherwhere.

I had already given Nan the key to Alma's piano, and, possessing a very sweet voice, she would often on evenings flood the house with music. Skip would sit near her and drink in the songs as he would egg-nog or sweet cider. She'd sing specially for him, such as "I dream of thee," and "I love thee only," and like nonsense, till he'd be completely intoxicated. Tiny ceased to giggle, and went about her work, silent, watchful and neglected, with a longing in her eye whenever Nan arrayed herself in fresh attire.

Now, however, little I was pleased over Tinie's evident admiration of Skip, still less was I satisfied over Nan's show of a like sentiment, and I was determined not to allow such proceedings while I had her in hand, and I spoke rather crossly to her about her conduct. Said she in a surprised tone: "I thought you wanted his affections alienated from Tinie; I was trying to please you; besides, it is agreeable pastime for me. He is perfectly charming and excruciatingly entertaining; it costs me the greatest effort to keep my features under control while he is pouring his sentimental rhap-

sodies and poetical gushings into my ears," and she burst into a merry laugh.

"Nan," I replied solemnly, "I much prefer you climbing trees, stuffing green apples and breaking colts, than go making a fool of Skip. He's dreadfully conceited; his imagination, like his conscience, is made of gum-elastic. It will be an easy matter for him to believe you love him, and when you undeceive him he will say something disagreeable about you, and now you've got to let him alone." To give emphasis to my remarks, I struck the table a resounding whack with the roller I was pressing pie crust with. She paid no heed to my words, but went straight on flirting with him.

Soon after this, Jim came with the intelligence that Uncle Gib had so far recovered as to be off on one of his long trips.

Nan viewed Jim and his Sunday attire with apparent fun and curiosity, and he having partly overcome his bashfulness, watched Nan with wonder lurking in his honest gray eye.

When she began singing and playing, he flung all restraint to the winds, drew near and asked her to sing spiritual songs, while he joined in with the bass. He loved music for music's sake, and forgot everything, even Tinie, who was restless as a leaf in the wind, fluttering in and out of the room, giving every indication of uneasi-

ness, considering she'd let Jim slide from her heart. Skip, too, was forgotten and sulked off to bed. After this, Jim fetched his fiddle and came more frequently. He and Nan fiddled, sang and talked. She'd ask him about trees and rocks and farm work, of all of which he had a goodly store of knowledge; and never a word did she let him have with Tinie, though quite often I made it my duty to break into their confidential chats and march her off to bed. When Jim had gone, she'd turn her battery of mellow looks and love-sick songs on Skip again, who would fall direct into line and move along straight as a plumb, swallowing her blandishments without a particle of trouble.

All this was very trying on me, who wished to keep my household under strict decorum. To Tinie and me she spoke depreciatingly of Skip and lauded Jim to the skies. One day we were all three engaged over one piece of work, canning, I think. Sighing deeply, she asked if I thought her father would give his consent to her marriage with Jim. Her pretended seriousness at this time I thought too apparent to be overlooked by the most stupid; but Tinie accepted it as truth. Poor Tinie, about this time I observed she was having a tough scuffle with her feelings. She stole quietly about with her lip dangling down like a motherless colt's. Not

a giggle did she indulge in, and I decided her last state was less endurable than the first.

One Sabbath morn, Jim came stalking up from the front gate attired in a suit of new clothes. I sat just inside the open window and heard their greeting, for Tinie was sweeping the veranda floor in a great hurry, and did not see him till he was by her side. She turned a startled look on him with—"Oh, Jim, you skeered me! I thought you was—"

"Your sweetheart, Mr. Sparks?" he asked contemptuously.

"No I didn't, neither," said she, blushing. "Jim, I'll never mix you up with him in my thorts any more."

"Thank you," says Jim, "the mixin' was no honor to me; and I'm glad you're honest enough to say you have decided to let him reign supreme in your affections. But some day, Tinie, you'll think of me and the faithful heart you've flung away for that weazel face monkey. I shall come here no more to trouble you with my presence when Miss Nan goes away."

"Oh, Jim," she repeated, as she raised her sad, humid eyes to his, "don't you know, can't you see that I—"

"Yes, I know," said he, interrupting, "you've a way of expressing yourself not to be misunderstood. When you said you loved me no

longer, my mind was just clear enough to take in all you meant. If you find you've made a mistake, you'll have to come and tell me so; I'll never go to you again with a proffer of my love. I would not tell Uncle Gid we'd played quits, his heart is so set on our marrying, it would have been a disappointment he'd not likely have got over, particularly while he was ailin'." With this he turned and went straight to Nan, who was trying sacred tunes on the piano.

Half an hour later I found Tinie in my room leaning on a table with her face buried in her hands.

"Tinie, are you ailing?" I asked.

"Not much," she answered, "only my head aches a little, as she turned her tear-stained eyes up at me.

"Perhaps it's your heart that aches. You'd better go to the parlor and see how becoming Jim Shanks' store clothes are. Nan is playing some new songs; you might learn to sing them."

"I hate her and her songs, too!" she cried, with venom, snuffling and sobbing the words out.

"Well, then, go out to the back gate where Skip is whittling and chewing so industriously and talk with him."

"I wish Skip was in Halifax," said she, yet sniffling; "and I hope to gracious some day

he'll whittle his head clean off'n his shoulders! He ain't fitten to live nohow!"

"Laws a massy, child, have you lost your senses?" I asked, surprised, for I didn't know she possessed so much snap.

Says she in a yet more distressed tone: "No, I wish I had! I wish I was dead."

"W'y, bless my soul, how do you suppose Uncle Gid and Jim would get on without you?" I asked consolingly. I struck the key note this time. Down went her head again and there was a fresh bout of bitter tears as she sobbed out: "I don't know what Uncle Gib would do, but Jim's makin' out mighty well 'thout me now."

Poor little creature! I read her heart at once. I did not know why she had written that poem, but I did know now that her heart was Jim's. Here was a muddle and Alma gone. I knew she could smooth out this love entanglement, for she'd had an ailment of like nature in her girlhood, but some time must elapse before her return. Nan Hollis' demeanor had been such that I trusted her no longer. She might have flirted with Skip till crack of doom, with not a scar left only to his vanity, but to coquet with poor, honest Jim's affections was more than I was called to put up with.

"Tinie," said I, after a moment's reflection, "if you lose Jim you let slip a mighty fine

chance for three good meals a day; but you've yourself to thank for it. I knew when you were angling for Skip, you were allowing your grip on Jim's affections to slacken, but should the opportunity offer of reclaiming him, you be careful not to trifle with his heart again."

With this I turned and left her to nurse her headache and heartache.

Nan came into the kitchen to assist me about preparing dinner, and was so merry after all the mischief she'd wrought I felt terribly inclined to box her ears. As she turned the slapjacks on the griddle she asked if Tinie was ailing much.

"Yes, you ought to ask after her health," I answered in wrathful tones, "the way you're carrying on with Jim Shanks, and her and him promised to marry; it's enough to make a saint ail!"

"Did you not know she'd broken that engagement for that lout out there?" she asked, pointing to Skip down on the meadow fence.

"Let me explain," she continued. "After you confided to me Tinie's story and showed such evident desire to aid Jim's suit, I grew interested, and in lieu of better amusement, I went about testing the stability of Tinie's and Skip's affection for each other. I soon proved the sincerity of Skip's devotion. Tinie made

two or three fruitless efforts to hold his attention, then good-naturedly ceased, being sustained by an inward conviction of possessing Jim's entire heart, and believing when weary of Skip she could turn to Jim and find him unchanged; but when the test came, she found, to her astonishment and grief, that he was not quite so acquiescent.

"When I first met Jim, I sat about studying him, and found 'a diamond in the rough.' And don't you think," said she, spreading a fresh batch of slap-jacks on the griddle, "don't you think I won the whole story from him at our second interview, by intimating I knew all about his trouble over Tinie's unfaithfulness? He loves her beyond anything earthly, and, to use his own language, would have "dug ditches, or climbed steeples for her sake.' They were betrothed with Uncle Gid's sanction. Then she met Skip and grew indifferent towards Jim and ridiculed his short pants and rusty coat; finally he became exasperated at her conduct and the engagement was broken. He enlisted my sympathies at once; I bade him not despair, for Skip was kneeling at my shrine, and paying me the most ardent devotions I had ever been the recipient of, and I had not the remotest idea of relinquishing him to Tinie. But I find Jim obstinate and unrelenting. He thinks it would be

too humiliating after the rejection of him, for Skip, to renew his offer of love; so Tinie must make all advances towards a reconciliation. But there are some facts in the case with which neither Jim nor Tinie are acquainted, and which I, through curiosity have obtained.'' Just here in her talk I missed Skip from the meadow fence.

Nan proceeded: ''A forlorn looking old man has been visiting Daddy's office at intervals for some time. I fell to wondering who in the world he could be, and what his business. Daddie informed me he was a wealthy land-owner, had bought, or taken up lands away off somewhere, and upon one claim he had somewhat neglected to look after, a town and railroad had sprung suddenly up. That forlorn-looking old man was Uncle Gid Miggles. He and Daddy are off, looking after that same land and will return next week.''

My indignation had been oozing out, drop by drop, all along the thread of her story, till now there was but little left.

''Go on,'' I cried, ''if you've anything more to say.''

After spreading butter on the last batch of flap-jacks, she proceeded: ''Can't you see through it all? If Uncle Gid proves up, Tinie

can buy the whole kit of us and have money left."

"Nan, are you sure certain, you're telling the truth?" I asked, doubtful.

"As true as truth," she replied; "and isn't it too lovely for anything? Like a romance in a novel; and to think I'm playing such an active part in it! I mean Jim and Tinie shall make up in the most approved style; his obstinacy is all the better for forwarding my plans—"

At this moment there was a terrible racket raised just outside the kitchen window, as if some one had fallen from somewhere. We looked in time to see Skip's Sunday coat-tail vanish around the corner. It occured to us in a moment that Skip had been eavesdropping.

"Oh! oh!" Nan cried in dismay, wringing her hands, "that was a secret, I heard Uncle Gid tell Daddy so!"

She tore round that kitchen like a scared rabbit.

"That scape-goat has heard every word! I could pound my own silly brains! Do some one cut my tattling tongue out! The low, vile sneak, had I known he was there, I should have deluged him with scalding water! Daddy will kill me in his anger, I'm sure; what shall I do?"

She dropped down on a chair entirely overcome, for she knew Skip would in some way

make use of the knowledge he'd so dishonestly obtained. She was in utter distress, wringing her hands and cudgeling her brains, and finally reached this conclusion: With my consent she would return home, and if possible, persuade Tinie to accompany her, there to await Uncle Gid's coming, and thereby guard her from Skip's advances. I told her I thought that unnecessary. I believed Tinie's recent experience had taught her how to value Jim's love, though I was not positive my conjectures were correct ones, for I knew there were many girls, after a rupture such as Tinie's and Jim's, who had wrecked their happiness by marrying the first offer, to prove to the world their indifference.

We found Tinie moping behind the window curtains in my room. It did not take Nan long to sufficiently explain the part she'd taken in the affair, and by an offer of great big wages to win Tinie's consent to go with her, for Nan had a willy-nilly tongue, and Tinie was pliant as a lump of biscuit dough. At Nan's instigation she wrote Jim a note which Nan handed him. Presently he came stalking in, and not observing Tinie, he walked straight to where I sat, his face ashy pale and his eyes like living coals of fire. Handing me the slip of paper he asked: "Is this true; if so, where is she?" I read:

"Dear Jim:—You would not listen to me this morning, but you will at least allow me to say farewell. I am going to L———, to seek another home, there to await Uncle Gid's coming. My head aches, which I hope you will accept as my excuse for taking this method of saying good-bye. 'Tinie."

"It's true," I replied, "and you'll find her in that window behind the curtain."

He faced about and without hesitation walked to where she sat. In his straightforward way he asked, as he leaned with one hand on a table, for he was somewhat nervous: "Tinie, are you running away from here to marry Skip Sparks?"

"To marry Skip Sparks!" she cried, indignantly; "I'd sooner go drown myself in the duck pond!"

"You didn't talk that way a week or so gone, just before Miss Nan came."

"You didn't ask me that question before Miss Nan came."

"But you said you didn't love me no longer."

"Because you got cross and spiteful at me, Jim."

"I had good cause for it," he said. "Skip was payin' you his notice, and you seemed mighty well pleased."

"You needn't fling that at me," she said; "I know somebody else that's mighty well pleased becaused they're noticed."

"Do you mean me, Tinie? Ask her—ask Miss Nan who I'm mostly interested in."

"She's the very one I'd ask if I was at all curious to find out, which I hain't."

"See here, Tinie," says Jim, bridling up, "I'm tired of this here perlaver."

"You begun it," said she.

"You shall end it," he answered, "for I'm goin' to ask you a straight, honest question, and you've got to answer in the same way; if you don't, with me it's good-bye forever. As sure as there's a heaven above us, I won't be trifled with longer—" He stopped short.

"I'm listenin'," she remarked, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Will you—will you marry me when Uncle Gid comes home?"

"What would I marry you for?" she asked.

"Because you love me."

"Ef them's all the conditions, I won't marry you, Jim."

"Well, then," leaning on the table for support again, she facing him, "because I love you, and shall be miserable till my life ends if you refuse to marry me."

Seeing her smile up at him (I was awfully afraid she'd giggle, she only smiled), he took her face in his two big hands, stooped down and kissed her.

"That clinches the bargain," I remarked, laughing outright.

Jim faced about, and for the first time remembered I was present. Leading her to me: "Can she stay with you till I come for her?"

"Most assuredly," I was going to reply, but was interrupted by Nan's appearance.

"You idiots!" she cried out, "you've spoiled all my plans. I meant to carry her home with me and hide her away in the cellar or attic, and let you go roaming the world over to find her; now there's nothing for me to do but congratulate."

We didn't see anything of Skip till Monday morn at breakfast. Tuesday eve, Tinie got the following epistle in our mail. As she read it I observed a troubled expression come into her smiling eyes.

"What is it now Tinie?" I questioned.

She handed me her open letter for perusal. It ran as follows:

"Miss Tinie Miggles.

"Dear Tinie:—You may be surprised at receivin' this epistol and when I declare to you

that my heart is bustin' with love and aisk you to be my wife and which cain't be happy no more in this life onless you say you will. I adoor you and caint not quell the troubling waters of my soul no longer, I mout as well try to squench the rath of the whirlwin'. I have tried to be indifferent and break the delurements your charms have cast about my heart by givin' ear to Nancy Hollises endearin' words and advances, for you or anybody could see with one eye shot and 'tother half open that she has been aimin' to entrap me into mattery mony ever sence she come, but I have at last turned a deef year to her, for I could never, no never, marry a girl who would do the courtin', but in you, dearest Tinie, I find combined all that is lovely and desirable. I have been yearnin' to tell you this but could not, for Nancy she dogs my steps so clost with her attentions. I think she will marry Jim Shanks when she finds I'm lost to her forever and which he like Barkis in the words of the immortal poet Dickents, seems willin'. I have formed a plan which I know will be agreeable to you. I want me and you to hie away from here and get marraid. Be shore and write me when we will hither go and ease my troubling mind. Don't let Nancy nor noby else see this. Forever your own true lovin' Skip."

Nan's prediction and my apprehension was being verified. Skip meant to take a nigh cut to fortune, and he had already begun vilifying and casting calumnious reflections on Nan, and I wanted her to know it; I believed it would be good for her morals, and without asking leave of Tinie, I forthwith read her that portion to herself.

"The contemptible, low-down, eavesdropping reptile!" she cried, throwing aside the letter she'd been reading. "I can't stay to undeceive him, for daddy has written me to come home, but I will write the vile creature a note and express myself fully as to my opinion of him."

"You shall do no such thing, Miss," I remarked in tones not to be mistaken. "I warned ye and ye paid no heed, so there."

Then she prevailed on Tinie to allow her the dictation of a reply to Skip's communication. They went immediately about it, which, when written ran thus:

"Mr. Sparks:—Owing to there being certain statutes in our country which forbids a woman having two husbands, I must decline the honor you seem so desirous of conferring on me. It is not Nancy, but I, who at an early date, am to marry Jim Shanks. And had you been sharp-sighted, you might even, 'with one eye shot and t'other half open,' have seen Nan Hollis was

only amusing herself at your expense. I must congratulate you on having come out of this encounter without a wound, and that no serious results followed your tumble from the window last Sunday when you were overlooking the preparations for dinner. Tinie."

This last thrust of Nan's, Tinie did not understand, no more than she did Skip's sudden change of conduct, and we dared not enlighten her yet. However, so soon as Skip read Tinie's reply, he bunched his duds and eloped with them to parts unknown. Nan went home, to return a little later to escort Jim and Tinie on a bridal tour to the big circus at L———. They were married at Jim's mother's, and were more than stupefied over Uncle Gid's bridal gift of lands and money.

CHAPTER XII.

AUNT CRONIE'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE HONEY BEE.

I had not by any means been forgetful of Laura, but had fairly lost sight of her. Her time was so occupied with her bees, her music class and other labors, she had no leisure for the bestowal of visits. I never met a girl of eighteen with so many tasks to perform who fulfilled all duties so perfectly. She ran in for a few moments' visit to Nan, but averred they were stolen moments, and that she'd be prosecuted for the theft. She was making amends, seemingly, for the eighteen years of idleness. Just so soon as the responsibility of Nan and Tinie was lifted from my shoulders, I resumed my old employment, that of solicitude for Laura; and one day I caught up a good-sized bucket and carried it over to procure honey of her. I was looking for Alma and the children home pretty soon, and must make arrangements for having a sweet time. Each one of those expected guests was proprietor of a sweet tooth, and I must make ample preparation for the gratification of that same.

It was now the last week in June, and they were to arrive the first of the incoming month. Bee swarming was about over, and Laura had begun robbing. From the twelve hives she had ten swarms, and had the good fortune to save all swarms. The honey crop was abundant and delicious. To the disappointment of Jack, she found a ready home market, and the idea of peddling about the streets of L——— was abandoned.

When I reached the bee yard, I found Laura with her bee bonnet and gloves on. Hovering near was Uncle Tobe similarly equipped. (The bee bonnet was invented for use, not adornment.) Not far away sat Aunt Crony on a chair nursing her rheumatism, while Patsy, out of danger's reach, reconnoitered the bee yard at various points. Pete was absent, had gone on an errand, not thinking the bees would swarm again so late; but as usual the unexpected had happened at an unpropitious moment, and Laura had called Uncle Tobe to her assistance.

The bees had alighted on a very high-up branch of a tree, where neither Laura nor Uncle Tobe could reach them with the swarming box. After debating for some time, they decided it would be best that Uncle Tobe should climb the tree, saw off a limb and lower it with a rope. A search for the rope was instituted, but no rope

could be found; then Laura remembered Pete had carried it home with him to make his mother a clothes line. At this moment I espied Pete away over on a hill almost a quarter of a mile away, returning from his errand, walking leisurely along, whistling loudly and merrily. I was almost sure he was so absorbed in the air he was trilling that his ears were closed to all outward sounds, but under the spur of necessity, I ran across the road and clinging to a high gate post, I stood on the fence and yelled: "P-e-e-t-t-e-r! "O-o-h- P-ee-tt-e-er!"

"Hello!" came resounding back.

"H-u-u-r-r-y u-p. Come by home and get the clothes line!"

"Whose cow is it choked and d-y-i-n-g? Tell granny to give her s-a-g-e t-e-a!" he called back.

"You come home q-u-i-c-k!" I bawled.

'Who'd you say was k-i-c-k-e-d?" came echoing from across the hill. I was at my wit's end.

"Tell him the bees have swarmed!" called Laura to me. But at that moment something more potent occurred to me.

"L-au-r-a! L-a-u-r-a!" I screamed. He shot from that hill like a flash, and five minutes later tumbled, puffing and blowing like a tempest into the bee-yard.

He looked over at Laura, dropped down on the grass, snatched his old hat off and with it

began fanning with a vengeance. Laura caught up a turkey wing they used about the bee-yard, and sitting down by his side she started a current of air with that wing sufficient to cool a red-hot furnace.

"Well I'm blowed, if I ever was so blowed," laughed Pete. "I thought some one said the cows had kicked you and you were dying," he continued, turning to Laura.

"A more serious matter for you than that has occurred. The bees have swarmed."

"No more serious matter could come my way," he said, putting the old hat back on his head.

"What, than for the bees to swarm?" she exclaimed.

"No, the other," he responded.

He rose to his feet, proffering his hand to assist her in the same.

"Now for business." He brought a table, placed it under the huge knot of bees, that hung in a cone-like mass from the branch of the tree; on the table he placed a box; donning the bee bonnet and gloves, he mounted upon this high perch. Grasping the swarming box, he thrust it up among the branches near the bees and gave a vigorous shake to the limb on which they hung.

Down they came, single, double, in clusters, by the bunch and most any old way you could think of; but almost instantly they began ascending again to the swarming box. A few stragglers lingered below, intent on other business. We all stood near by gazing up, not thinking of trouble.

"Look out," called Pete from his eminence above.

Just then a bee with agitation in its voice came my way and I fled to the porch in front of the cottage to watch proceedings from a safe distance.

"Clar out from dis, Crony, or you'll forgit you got de rumatiz terrec'ly," shouted Uncle Tobe.

At this instant a sharp squeak proceeded from Patsy's neighborhood. Pawing the ground and beating her head, she made a dash for Aunt Crony, who had, seemingly with greatest difficulty and aid of her crutch, risen from her chair.

"Don't you come dis way, nigger," raising the crutch menacingly. "You git wus'n bees ef I lam you over de haid wid dis crutch."

Unheeding the admonition, Patsy circled nearer and nearer her granny. Finally, in a last effort to escape from her pursuer, she gave a prolonged squeal and a bound that landed her, a slimpsy heap at Aunt Crony's feet.

Uncle Tobe's warning of his wife about **forgetting** her "rumatiz" asserted itself by an unhesitating relinquishment of her crutch and a decided stampede for safe quarters.

"Oh, Lordy! I'se done up dis time," she groaned, sinking on the door-step near me.

"Ugh! ugh! I feel it in my bones, I'll **never be** able to move off'n dis do' step, I know I shant," she continued, while rubbing the afflicted limb compassionately.

"Ef I had dat nigger by de wool, I'd give 'er what she need, I'd poun' 'er sof', I would. I 'low I wouldn't leave bre'f in her body, de confoun' little debil. I don't know how I gwine git up fum here 'dout no crutch nor nuffin to he'p me. Ugh! ugh! I jest can't nohow."

I was going to suggest calling Uncle Tobe to fetch the needed articles, but at this moment Patsy rose to her feet and with renewed elasticity, came bounding toward us at breakneck speed, pounding her head and squealing every jump, with two or three bees in full chase.

Once more Aunt Crony rose to the occasion and off she waddled.

Patsy, not viewing rheumatic grandmothers in the light of obstacles, ran into the old woman, upsetting her, rheumatism and all, where she was left prostrate, calling on the Lord to save her from utter destruction. I went to her assist-

ance, and, with Uncle Tobe's help, rescued her from further demolition.

Patsy and her three bees had skurried over the yard fence and away out across the lot, out of sight and hearing.

"Gi' up fum he'ar, Crony," said Uncle Tobe harshly, raising her with difficulty. "Nex' time you better take my device an' stay at home."

"I hopes fum de bottom er my soul dat gal break 'er naik as she libs," said Aunt Crony.

"I 'low you git yer wish, fur as de naik goes. I see 'er turn er summerset, nuf to break de naik off er two-year-old yearlin' calf over that ar bob wire fence on tur side the lot."

"Good Lord a massy, Tobe, run, honey, and hunt de chile. I clar ef she hurt anywhars I never git ove' it. I promise her mammy on 'er dyin' baid, I take keer dat precious one, lak she was a suckin' lam', and ef she hu't herse'f—fer God's sake, Tobe, honey, run, run ef you gwinter and see 'bout de po' chile."

And Crony, leaning on her recovered crutch, gave vent to a mournful howl, while watching Uncle Tobe as he cantered across the lot, from whence he soon returned with the sobbing "lam'."

"Patsy, honey, is you hu't?" called out Aunt Crony as they neared us.

"No-oh-um, I not hurt, bu-ut I skeered inter ker-kernipshum fits," Patsy sobbed.

"Well, I glad you not hu't; I hu'ts you when I gits you home. I have a sho'-nuff settlement, you good fur nothin', low down scrape goat. Sho' you born I give you kernipshum fits," said Aunt Crony, shaking her fist at Patsy in a menacing way, as she hobbled off towards home, Patsy following, sobbing and scrubbing her two eyes with her little black fists.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS JEAN CARVIL.

Early one morning Doctor Brice called and informed me of the illness of Miss Jeannette Carvil. She and I were quite good friends and accustomed to an exchange of all-day visits twice or thrice each year. I had been due her one of these annual calls for some time, but our social intercourse had been interrupted by the arduousness of my household duties, and when I learned of her illness I felt a twinge of conscience, and my mind was immediately made up to at once visit her.

Miss Jeannette, or Miss Jean, as she was more familiarly called, was a kind, loveable, lonely old maid, living out a mile or two from the station on a farm with the old family servants who had come with her from Sunny Florida, not as slaves, but still proving their allegiance by never having deserted her. When I reached Miss Jean's room I found the old servant, of Miss Jean's own age, sitting by the bedside, anticipating every wish of the invalid, with

a huge peacock's tail, fighting away any investigating fly that came buzzing round.

Miss Jean was one whom most of her neighbors esteemed, for her kindly, pleasant manner and many benevolent acts, though there were some narrow-minded, near-sighted, prejudiced individuals who censured her manner of living alone with the slaves of other days. I often thought of the ugly duckling when I heard these offensive, ill-natured innuendoes cast at the sweet, loving Jean Carvil.

When that time arrives, that each of us shall have our willingly distorted views drawn in a straight line for us by the One whose all-seeing eye penetrates the heart of all, how confused, how embarrassed and sneaking we will feel at the deformities of the mean prejudiced thoughts we have held towards our fellow beings.

Miss Jean was a relic of ante-bellum days—a child of the Sunny South, which fate, or destiny, had transplanted to Kentucky soil. That she was not happy, or content, a casual acquaintance would never suspect. One not knowing what her early experiences had been, or her life, previous to her advent among us, would believe she had never been other than the quiet, stately being, who came and went often among us, as a ministering angel, where want and distress abode, never once passing by on the other side.

To me she had in part revealed the story of her early life, before the civil war and after; but it was only in part; for this day I'm speaking of when I made her a visit, I got the revelation in its entirety.

Said she: "I was the petted, spoiled child of fortune. Loved to idolatry by a proud, stern, ambitious father; adored to excess by an indulgent mother; petted and worshipped as something too superior for earth by a large plantation of dusky slaves; it was not to be wondered over that I grew up a spoiled aristocrat. When I was ten years old, a little brother came to share in the love and adoration lavished heretofore on me alone, but with the advent of little Paul, my darling mother's life went out.

"After my school days were over, I entered society as its queen. The idol of a select set, I engaged with zest in every pleasure that presented itself, and enjoyed to the utmost all that life could give of enjoyment. I was called the beautiful, the fascinating Miss Carvil, all of which had a tendency to generate within me a spirit of pride and arrogance.

"In my circle I reigned supreme, till one fateful evening I destroyed all, ruined my prospects for a wealthy marriage, which my father had planned for me with a young neighbor, whose estate joined ours, and rendered furious that

father's irascible temper, when he made the discovery that I had fallen irrevocably in love with a young theologian—a poor Methodist preacher's son."

"Yes, yes, honey," said Aunt Inda, who still sat near. "I never see nobody so mad in all my born days as Mars John Carvil when he learn de fac'. He r'ar, he t'ar er'round jes lak er mad cow critter, skeered us niggers might nigh out our senses, specially me, as was one o' de house gerls and pinted to tend on Miss Jean. 'Pears lak I kin hear my years er ringin' ter dis day, when I think how he box 'em right an' lef', when I couldn't tell but jes' what I knowed about de case an' no mo'. Hit make me mad and scar' me, too, twell dis day thinkin' 'bout it."

"I met Ernest Irving," continued Miss Jean, after Aunt Inda's outburst of unpleasant memories, "at an evening's entertainment, and was fascinated by the charm of his serious, earnest manner and strikingly handsome and interesting face and form, not thinking on that evening but that I should forget him by to-morrow, as I had many another handsome and interesting passing acquaintance; but no, I was mistaken in my desires and conclusions, for his face and manner kept recurring to me, and, strive hard as I might to efface him from my mind, I could not. 'No., no,' I said to myself,

'I must not think so incessantly of this handsome, prosy preacher. I shall destroy my peace of mind if I do not desist from such folly; I will forget him, I will obliterate this youth to fortune and to fame unknown, from my thoughts. I will thrust him out; he shall not take possession of my mind in any such way as this,' and I busied myself in making up an elaborate toilet for a thespian entertainment, gotten up for some charitable purpose which I cannot now remember.

On the evening of this performance, one of the leading actors, or, rather, one who had control of the orchestra, Kenneth Stanton, a tall, well grown young friend of mine, was called away, and in his stead Ernest Irving substituted. Being one of the performers myself, and not knowing of the change, after Inda had attired me in my elegant costume, I rushed down stairs and on to the stage which was erected in the large hall of the elegant Stanton mansion in the city. I was full of animation and delight at the beauty of my stage costume, for I had not then reached a realization of the truth that there were more serious things to consider than dress, admiration and flattery.

"I reached the stage, and seeing Kenneth Stanton alone, as I thought, standing in the dim reflection of the footlights, looking intently at

a scenic portiere which was hung at the rear of the stage, I tripped lightly down to his side and grasping him by the arm I exclaimed:

"'Oh, Kenneth Stanton, do turn about and tell me truly what you think of me as an artist in dress!'

"I felt myself blushing violently when not Kenneth Stanton, but Ernest Irving turned and surveyed me from my stage-betinsled crowned head to the white slipper that protruded from beneath my satin skirt.

"'Shall *I* tell you, Miss Carvil, what *I* think of you?' he asked, slowly, seriously. 'Shall I tell you, you are the most beautiful, the most radiant, the most bewitching creation with which my vision was ever blessed? Shall I say that were an angel from that bright, celestial world above to drop at my feet this evening with a message and demand my attention, were you near, I should turn from her to you and offer the homage of my heart, my soul, my entire life, for I love you, I adore you.'

"'But you are talking in your sleep,' I quoted, for I had to some extent recovered my equipoise, although trembling and embarrassed, not only over the mistake I had made, but for the thrill of extreme pleasure his words were affording me.

"'No, I'm neither sleeping nor dreaming,' he continued in the same quiet, serious tone; 'I have slept but little since our last meeting, yet when I did a vision of your sweet presence haunted my pillow, and I find you so kind, so gracious in my dreaming, I would fain sleep eternally. I know I am presuming when I tell you this, but trust to your kind heart and noble nature to forget and forgive my obtrusiveness in giving utterance so prematurely to my burning thoughts. Miss Carvil, will you forget and forgive my presumptions?'

"My heart was momentarily going out to him. I felt instinctively the truth of his protestations, and I was happy, more happy than I had ever been in all my eighteen years.

"'Oh, Mr. Irving,' I cried, trying to restrain the happy tears that forced themselves to my eyes, 'I can forgive you, but I cannot—I cannot—' I hesitated.

"'Well, cannot—go on, please.'

"'I cannot forget,' I said impulsively.

"'Would you,' he asked, regarding me earnestly, 'retain the memory of my words, that you might enjoy the thought of another who had fallen a victim to your charms?'

"His last words pained me excessively.

"You wrong me, Mr. Irving, indeed you do. It is not for the reason you assign that I cannot forget.'

"My tears and my trembling attitude must have emboldened him, for he caught my hand in his and drew me unresistingly nearer.

" 'It is, then, because you feel pity for me? Do not pity me, Miss Carvil; I would prize your scorn more than your pity.'

" 'It is because—because—' I was crying blindly by this time, and he held both my hands in a tight clasp, and I had not any handkerchief.

" 'Because what?' he asked.

" 'Oh,' I said, 'cannot you let go of my hands? Do you not see you have made me cry by your unjust accusations? I am spoiling my laces and rendering my face unfit to be seen.'

" 'Allow me,' and taking both my hands in one of his, he drew a fresh handkerchief from his coat pocket and dried my falling tears.

"It was only for a moment I permitted this, for I haughtily and forcefully drew my hands from his clasp. He was behaving towards me as though I were a child, and suddenly I felt all the dignity of my eighteen years stimulating me to resent such liberty.

"'You have not answered me,' he said, relinqishing my hand. 'You know "*because*" is woman's indefinite reason for all things.'

"'I cannot remember that I am due you an answer,' I replied, with much hauteur. Then I could have bitten my tongue out for in any way reverting to what he had previously asked me. I felt that I was soliciting a reiteration of his question, which, in my embarrassment, I had for the moment forgotten, and I felt in a vague way that it was something perilous to venture on. I felt myself blushing and growing a little angry at his persistent, masterful manner. I had encountered several wooings, but nothing so serious, so perplexing, so ardent as this.

"'Miss Carvil,' he asked earnestly, 'would you deem it impertinence in me if I were to ask if you are heart-whole? I mean, is your heart in your own keeping? You already know what my feelings are for you.'

"'Mr. Irving, what right have you to probe into my heart secrets? How dare you?'

"Then I paused and looked at him with all the indignation I could summon to my aid. Returning my look with those penetrating eyes, that read my very soul, he calmly made reply: 'The same right that any honest, sincere man has, who feels that his future depends upon one

or two little words spoken by her who holds that future in her keeping, whether for weal or woe. Is it true that you are plighted to Norman Ashmead? Answer me truly. I will keep your secret inviolate.'

"With an indifference I did not feel I made reply: 'I have done nothing that entitles me to a father confessor, and I refuse to answer you.'

"He paled to the very lips at my manner and utterance, and I saw I had given him pain. As for me, I was on the eve of shedding a few more tears, but at the thought of that immaculate handkerchief, I restrained them. Down in the depths of my heart I acknowledged this man my king, and I could not bear the thought of seeing him suffer, so I replied, resuming a more pleasant tone:

" 'Mr. Irving, that is my father's and Norman Ashmead's arrangement, not mine.'

" 'And you are free to be wooed and won?' he asked, brightening; "free to bestow your heart on whomsoever you choose?'

"His dark, penterating eyes were upon me again. I knew he was determined to have the truth from me, if possible, and I was equally determined not to yield, and yet I knew he would not accept bandinage, or subterfuge, or

the slightest swerving from the matter under discussion.

"'Perhaps I'm not altogether heart whole,' I answered evasively, 'but you need not let that fact engross so much of your attention.'

"'Since when did you discover your heart was wandering?'

"He was smiling now, and strove to catch my hand again, but I eluded him by moving further away.

"'Miss Carvil,' he began again, with a return to seriousness, 'if you love Norman Ashmead, or otherwise, and are keeping him in suspense, do so no longer; let me implore you, do not trifle with an honest man's heart.'

I returned, blushing under his close scrutiny: 'I have never loved Norman Ashmead; love does not come at your beck or call, hence I have made no effort to love him.'

"'I know,' he said quietly, 'yet he seems a worthy young man, and has wealth at his command; why can you not love him? Is it because your heart is not your own to bestow on him?'

"It was with a mixture of sarcasm and vexation I made this reply: 'I infer, Mr. Irving, in your anatomical researches the heart must have been the only organ you made a study of, as the heart is the only part of the human organization you prefer to discuss.'

"I moved nearer the hand-painted portiere—my own work, which Enid Stanford had borrowed for the occasion.

"Striving to dissipate from his mind my last cutting remark, I asked, assuming a pleasant tone: 'Have you ever observed how inferior work like this takes on a more respectable appearance in artificial light?' I surveyed my portiere as though I'd never seen it before.

" 'I had observed nothing of the kind,' he returned. 'When I first saw the work this evening I thought what a beautiful conception and how well executed. I came near being a painter myself, but yielded to the stronger inclination to work in the Master's vineyard. Since when, Miss Carvil, did you find you were not heart-whole?'

" 'What if I were to tell you it was none of your affair,' I stingingly answered.

"He paid no heed whatever to my last words, but went persistently on with his probing, fixing my attention with those penetrating eyes of his.

" 'Pardon me, but are you sure your heart had not wandered beyond recall when you went to that entertainment, evening before last?'

" 'Most assuredly,' I replied, not divining his purpose.

" 'When you returned home was your heart yet in your own keeping? I saw you had many admirers, and discovered you did not enjoy the last hours of your stay with the same avidity that marked your manner when you first entered the rooms; you ceased to dance and seemed a little preoccupied with "some sweet thought." "

" 'You deserve much credit for close observation and discernment, and are very persistent in your effort to penetrate a matter that is of no earthly interest to you,' I replied, somewhat passionately.

" 'If you will assure me,' he said calmly, 'in all honesty and truthfulness, that I hold no part in your esteem, that you regard me only as any other acquaintance of the moment, I will never again punish you with my protestations of love. Did you know, Miss Carvil, the tocsin of war would soon be resounding from end to end of our country? That there will soon be a call for enlistment to oppose what we feel to be despotism? That the flower of all this chivalrous sunny land will respond to that call? I feel that I shall cast my lot in with these volunteers and march away to the music of fife and drum, perhaps to return no more to sunny Florida, for life is a precarious affair in the battlefield.'

"'Oh, Mr. Irving, is that true?' I asked in alarm. 'Father never tells me anything that is likely to disturb my mind, neither will he allow others so to do.' I had moved unwittingly nearer him.

"'Would it cause you one pang of regret should I go away and you see me never again?' he asked quietly.

"'Oh, I cannot, I cannot endure this longer!' I cried. 'Why do you torture me thus?' I covered my face with my hands in a babyish fashion, and started on a fresh bout of weeping. The first thing I knew he had his arms about me and I was shedding my tears on his shoulder.

"'Do you love me just a little, dearest, and will you permit me to claim you as my own? Tell me you will be my own lassie, Jean.'

"This time he kissed my tears away.

"'I do not know, I cannot say. Oh, I'm really, truly most miserable—no, I mean I'm—'" The next moment, like an idiot, I was laughing over my silly chatter. I drew myself from his embrace and moved from his side, for I heard Enid and the girls scampering and laughing down the stairway. Enid ran down the stage to find Ernest Irving gazing intently at the portiere, while I, pretending my tinsel crown needed readjustment, which it really did, was busily engaged over that.

" 'Are you, Mr. Irving, like all others, admiring Jean's work?' asked Enid.

" 'Ah!" said he, "Miss Carvil did not to me acknowledge proprietorship of the painting. And it is hers, is it?" and before Enid could reply, he continued, 'I came early for that rehearsal,' showing nothing of the embarrassment I felt, for I was more miserable and more happy than I'd ever been previous to this. Miserable at thought of my father's anger, happy in the realization that I was loved by a noble, good man.

"Enid surveyed me critically. I think women read each other intuitively.

" 'Why have not you and Mr. Irving been rehearsing your parts?' she questioned. 'I thought that was why you came down some time ago.'

" 'I did not know Mr. Irving was here; neither did I know he had taken a part in the evening's performance," I returned.

"She turned her eyes from me to him; he answered the look pleasantly. "Miss Carvil and I have been exchanging views as to superior and inferior art, unfortunately disagreeing. You know, Miss Enid, I was once a dauber; besides, we have been trying to get better acquainted; you remember we were strangers till evening before last.'

"'Yes, I had forgotten that,' she replied, rather reflectively; 'suppose we try those songs again.' Soon after this we proceeded to the work of the evening, but I must have performed my part poorly, for Enid came to me and asked: 'Jean, what is the matter with you? You who knew your part so perfectly, are continually having to be prompted. I believe you're falling in love with that young divine.'

"'No! No!' I vehemently protested, 'I'm not falling in love with that young divine,' yet I might with truth have added, 'The fall has already taken place, and I'm striving to recover from the effects of that violent and altogether unexpected descent.'

"I did not recover; in fact, the symptoms grew more serious.

"At the close of the entertainment Ernest Irving came to me and asked permission to call at my home the next day. I said to him I should remain with Enid three days longer. He then asked permission to accompany me home, that he might obtain my father's consent to address me, for said he, 'I have been rather premature in my advances, and, dearest, I will not take blushes and tears as an assurance of your love, but just say to me once: "Ernest Irving, I love you and will be your wife," then I shall be content till I see your father.'

"Bravely I answered: 'Mr. Irving, I do love you, and will be your wife or no man's, and I can assure now of your inability to ever win my father's consent to our union. It would be useless for you to visit him for that purpose.'

" 'What are we to do in the event he refuses me your hand? Shall we wait till fortune smiles more propitiously on our union, or shall we hie us away to some Gretna Green? I dare ask his permission to claim you; I have no fears since assured of your love, and to win his consent is the only honorable course to pursue.'"

" 'Oh, I fear his anger, I fear his wrath,' I replied. 'He is so determined I shall wed Norman Ashmead, although I have never given my consent to do so, his disappointment, his rage I fear more than you can understand.'

"I know, Judge Carvil is a very determined man, yet I believe I can overcome his objections. I will at least make the effort,' he continued, looking over at Norman and Enid who lingered chatting. 'I believe we are attracting the attention of the loiterers, so adieu till to-morrow.'

"For the remainder of my three days' stay with Enid I was either laughing hysterically over the nonsense the girls were talking, for there were four of us who remained after the play, or I was bathed in tears. These girls

teased me relentlessly about my "modern Plato,' as they were pleased to style Ernest Irving. Once Norman, seeking me in the garden, found me alone shedding foolish tears. I was longing for the quietude of my room at home, and in apprehensive dread of my father's anger when he should learn of my love for Ernest Irving.

"The day I was to return home, father called for me. He usually drove from his office in the city, each afternoon, to our country residence, two miles out, in a light vehicle. On this particular afternoon he was in a closed carriage, and with him Norman Ashmead. While Inda was being drawn up by Sam, our driver, to a seat beside him, Norman assisted me to a seat within, and placing himself by my side, he began a petty raillery about my new catch. I was annoyed and embarrassed at this, and turned my face, which I felt reddening, absolutely from him. Father, who sat opposite, observed this, and turned an inquiring look on me.

" 'Of whom are you speaking, Norman?' he asked.

" 'Of that young Adonis of a Methodist preacher, Ernest Irving,' he replied. 'He is so interested in ascertaining Jean's spiritual status, he has monopolized considerably more of the time she spent with Enid than was neces-

sary. We knights must look to our laurels when Irving presents himself.'

"I uttered not a word, but looked from the carriage window at the lovely landscape, the lingering rays of the setting sun was glorifying.

" 'And has my daughter led captive the poor little parson?' asked my father, jestingly.

" 'I disclaim all intention of holding him an unwilling captive,' I replied with asperity. 'As to his poverty, I think we might call one a rich man, possessing as he does, a wealth of knowledge, not easily acquired only by a mind pre-eminently superior to common mortals. As to avoirdupois, I think he and Norman equally balanced. And perhaps, father, when he attains your age and dignity, he may also have attained your bulky proportions.'

" 'Humph!' was all the reply father deigned.

" 'You are right, Jean,' said Norman, 'in your estimate of Irving's size. He spent a few days with me last week on my plantation. One afternoon we were out boating, and Don Pedro, the little darkey who insists on following me on every excursion I make over my estate, had installed himself in our boat before we reached it. After we had launched into deep water, Don inadvertently turned a summersault over the edge of the boat. Head down he went, out of

sight. Before I could interfere, Mr. Irving had doffed his coat and was after him. A needless move, for I could have rescued the boy without going into the water, though Mr. Irving was not acquainted with this fact. We returned home and I supplied him with dry apparel, which fitted as though made for him. I met him first in Atlanta, where he receives a thousand dollars per year for his pastoral care of a church. He intends going to Europe next year. A noble young man I consider him.'

"Down in the depths of my heart I thanked Norman for these kind words. On reaching home father insisted he should remain over night with us, which he was not averse to doing. Living on adjacent plantations, Norman and I had known each other from infancy, and it seemed strange and unnatural that I should not have conceived the affection for him he claimed to have always possessed for me. He was handsome, courteous and generous to a fault, and had received a liberal education. From childhood he had entered into all my likes and dislikes with a readiness that was not altogether pleasing to me at times, yielding to my whims and caprices in a way that would have been gratifying to most girls, yet this seemed not to inspire the love Norman meant it should; and it was always 'No, Norman, I love you only as a

friend—a brother.' Sometimes he would say, 'Hang the brother and butcher the friend, I mean to remove the two some sweet day.' He was always patient and kind, but I felt now I must give him a rebuff that would check any other advances.''

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS JEAN'S STORY, INTERSPERSED WITH A FEW ITEMS FROM INDA'S EXPERIENCE.

"After supper, father withdrew to the library, ostensibly to write letters. I knew it was to give Norman a chance to renew his offer and to tell me for the hundredth time of his love. When father had gone, Norman and I were left alone, except for Inda, flitting in and out, with some pretext for so doing. Inda was an incorrigible eavesdropper, a habit I could never cure her of."

Here Miss Jean looked at Inda with a faint smile.

"But I done got over dat long er go, honey," said Inda. "I had mighty powerful good reasons for lis'nen' dat time, fur you see Mrs Norman's George was makin' up to me, an' didn't understan' zactly how ter talk, an' me jes a honin' for him to court me like Mars Norman did Miss Jean, an' I lowed ef I could ketch on to some few words er Mars Norman's, I could teach George de right mesods er love makin', for Mars Norman he jes up to de business, prac-

ticed fur ten year, courtin' Miss Jean,'' and Inda tee-heed, I suppose, just as she did when a girl of sixteen.

''But I did git out dat room,'' she continued. ''I got jes as fur as de key-hole on de outside dat big do', an' I hear sumpin but not zacly what I want to, but I low at de time, I make it answer my pupus. Den I hears mammy rattlin' de keys and lockin' up, an' she holler out to me: 'Indy, clar up dem supper dishes an' come er long, dars gwine be er dance to our quarters ter night.' I ans'ers back, 'Yes'm,' way off from dat key-hole.'' Another tee-hee.

''Norman,'' continued Miss Jean, ''reiterated almost the same words of Ernest concerning the pending warfare, into which we were soon after precipitated. 'And, Jean,' said he, ''if you could vouchsafe me some assurance of your love, I could go forth to battle with more courage, more fortitude. Like knight of old, wearing his ladies' favors, I should fight more valiantly for our rights and the preservation of our homes, remembering the smile and the love awaiting me when I should return a conquering hero.'

'' 'Oh, Norman,' I replied, 'you know I never admired a battlefield hero, and I tremble and shrink at thought of what might, what will occur should our fair land be invaded by a re-

lentless foe, such as the North is likely to prove. And, Norman, must I repeat, I love you as a brother, as a dear friend, nothing more.'

"'The friend and brother be hanged on the same gibbet,' he said irritably, whereupon I again, as on a previous evening, put my hands over my face and burst into tears. I had never yielded so lamentably to tears as of late, but it seemed I'd gone at it in a methodical way. The most trivial matter would cause my tears to start. I was not happy. Since my dear mother's death nothing had come my way of a very grievous or tear-producing nature. Father had watched over Paul and me with such unrelenting care that all disturbing influences had been withheld. But here was Norman, a dear friend, pleading for the love I could not give, a vivid prospect of our happy land being involved in warfare; but what gave me most pain was the thought of Ernest's visit to father on the morrow, for he was persistent in knowing the state of father's mind.

"'Jean,' said Norman, forcibly drawing my hands from my face, 'you're not the girl you were a fortnight ago. You, so vivacious, so gay, what has come over you? This is twice I have found you in tears of late, what does it mean? Tell me, Jean, tell me truly, what your trouble is. Like Enid, I believe you've let your heart

stray parsonward; I at least have feared this since the first evening I saw you two together.' He rose and walked from end to end of the room, at last resuming his seat by my side.

' 'I do not,' said he, 'ask for further confirmation of my fears than your silence. But, oh, dearest, how can I resign you to another? How can I give you up? I have cherished the thought so long, so long, of one day claiming you as my own, and now to surrender that hope seems impossible.''

" 'Norman, you surely hold me blameless. Have I ever encouraged you in entertaining such thoughts? You certainly do not condemn me for something of which I am guiltless?'' I returned.

" 'I wish you had encouraged me,' he replied, 'then I should have some foundation for my persistent folly.'

"Again the walking was resumed. At last, I rose from my chair and together we promenaded that floor for an hour, with my hand clasped tightly in that of my faithful friend, dear Norman. I never found a truer, more faithful friend in all the after years of sorrow and distress with which I was o'erwhelmed.

"As we walked, I told him all. Of Ernest's love, and of my own futile effort to combat the affection I found engrossing my entire mind.

Through the whole of my confession he was sympathetic and forgiving. Once he asked permission to light a cigar, which was readily granted.

"Said he: 'I will not remain over night, as agreed upon, but walk home across the plantations.' He raised the heavy blinds, looking out. 'See, the moon is beaming, the stars are gleaming, and invites us to a further stroll. Come with me as far as the terrace, Jean.'

"I threw a light covering over my head and we went out in the moonlight and the star-gleam, and though nearing mid-winter, the air was scented with the fragrance of flowers.

"As we passed into the hall, before going from the rooms, I heard in advance of us a scampering, and knew Inda had been at her old practices. She had circled hastily through the rooms and reached the veranda in advance of us.

" 'Oh, Miss Jean!' she called, 'can I go to the quarters to-night? Mammy say dey's goin' to dance.' "

"I 'members it all," said Inda, laughing immoderately.

"The dance," resumed Miss Jean, "at one or the other quarters each week was something that appealed to the hearts of the darkies. From adjoining quarters they would gather in and

trip the light fantastic toe to the music of fiddle and banjo till the hour of ten warned them to disperse, each one carrying his pass or permit.''

''Yes, honey,'' remarked Aunt Inda, recovering from an obstinate spasm of te-hees, brought about at recollection of that particular dance, ''yes, I 'members dat same moon-shiney night; it is deflected most 'stinctly on my mind, te-he-he, dat was de ve'y night, wid my help, what George pluck up courage to ax me, an' I gwine tell you how 'twas, for Miss Jean she done talk nuf for dis time. Well, de dance hit begin and I dance fust wid Bob Stanton, den wi' Jim Ashmead, den Bob ergin, den some udder coon. I gun to git skeerd feard George not gwine to ax me dance wi' him 'tall. I been keepin' one eye on 'im,'' and Aunt Inda rolled her eyes over her left shoulder as though she still had George under strict surveillance. ''George, he set right still all dar by hiss'ef, and pear like he feard of sumpin. His eyes was bigger then than they is now; he was pop-eyed nigger; seem lak ef you tap 'im hard on back de haid his eyes drap out, dey bulge out like er frog's; but he powerful han'some, I thought. So at de win' up of de kerdrill I was dancin' I shied round and flopped down right close to George and fan myse'f mighty fierce. Then I look at Bob as was stan'in' by my cher, an' I say: 'I feels lak ef

I had er cool drink of water I'd moderate.' Up George hops and off he puts. The Lord a marsy, I thinks, the fool nigger done run off when I was hopin' Bob would go for de water an' leave me an' George settin' dar close togeder. In er minit George he done returns back wi' a goa'd er water. Bob he try to take de goa'd an' 'tween 'em dey spills 'bout half de water on dat pink silk dress Miss Jean han' over to me. I turn on Bob fierce as er viper. 'Bob Stanton,' I say, 'you clar out fum here, you cornfoundered nigger; you done ruin dis pink silk custoom, so 'twont be fitten to pack insides er bar in!' Bob he took out peert 'nuf when he see de look in my eye. Then I turns to George mighty mild an' says: 'George, you look kinder lonesome and offcast and disperitable settin' roun' here 'wastin' your sweetness on de dress your hair.' I hear Miss Jean say dat onct, an' I keep it in mind twell I need it. George he 'low, puttin' his hand to his haid, 'Indy, I didn't have no time to dress my hair, 'cause I has to look after things; Mars Norman he been gone four, five days.' 'Yes,' I say, 'Mars Norman up de house long wi' Miss Jean, and he pintedly makin' love to dat Miss Jean jes' er bout de way men folks ought to do, when deys got er sweetheart dey keers fur. He jes take Miss Jean by de han' an' he press dat little han' to his lips.' You mus'

understan' I was makin' dis for George's benefits an' discouragement, he dat bashful. I goes on an' I say, 'Mars Norman he hold dat little han', and den presently he sneak his arm 'round Miss Jean an' he tells her he loves none but her, an' he kiss 'er right in de mouf. Dat clinch de bargain 'tween 'em, an' dey gwine marry soon's she git her trousers made.'

"'Golly, gal,' say George, clampin' down on my han' what lay convenient, 'I 'lowed it took consider'ble of talk an'—an'' 'No, George,' I say, 'white folks dey knows best, an' 'words deys cheap,' I hear Mars John say onct, an' Miss Jean she don't investigate in cheap goods, an' George, you know, when he gits dat arm 'roun' 'er, she knows he loves 'er 'thout er nuther word.' I feel George's arm inchin' by inch gittin' 'roun' me, an' he say, 'Indy, does you un'nerstan' I loves you, an' wants you to marry me?'

"'Yes, George,' I say, 'an' some day, like as not, I'll marry you. Yonners Bob Stanton an' mammy bofe lookin' at you.'

"'Indy,' he say all at onct, bol' as brass, 'I don't keer who in thunder's lookin', ef you don't.'

"'I shoo do loves you, George,' I say; 'now less dance.'

"And George he de livelyest nigger on dat groun', cuttin' up all sorter explites.

"Mammy she comes 'roun' after de dance over; she say, 'George Ashmeaed, what you mean 'bracin' Indy for, I wanter know, and dat mighty quick too.'

"George up sassy-like and say, 'I means to 'brace 'er more'n dat, you 'low us ter marry.'

"Mammy kinder smilin' say: 'You git out fum here, you fool nigger, git home fo' de patter roller cut de blood out your black hide; I hope he ketch you dis night.' An' mammy th'ow 'er haid back an' laugh fit to split her ribs, she dat tickled, thinkin' me and George and Miss Jean and Mars Norman gwine mix de famblys. But I feels powerful bad 'bout dat lie I tole George, an' I 'low to straighten it up de very nex' night, he done tole me he comin'; but bless de Lord, me an' Miss Jean bof prisoners in de loom house de very nex' night, when I hear George come singin' 'Jolly rolly ran so he cross de fields.' When he git nigh ernuf to hear, I stick my mouf to er hole in de wall where de chinkin' done fell out, an' I call: 'Oh, George!' He stop still as er mountain, an' I say, 'Come here to de loom house, George.' I awful feard dat nigger run, thinkin' I was a ghos', but he say, 'Dat you, Indy?' 'Yes,' I say, 'dat me.' Then he come up an' he say, 'What you doin' in de loom

house dis late?' An' I says, 'Mars John got mad and slap me an' Miss Jean bof in here an' ain't gwine let us out no more. You run home, George, an' tell Mars Norman.'

"George he say, 'I let you out.' He try de do' fas', den de winder, fas', all fas' and tight.

" 'Indy,' George say, 'what you and Miss Jean been done?'

" ' 'Cause,' I say, 'Miss Jean love er preacher and wanter mar' him, and I loves you and wanter mar' you, an' Mars John won't low us.'

" 'Indy,' says George, ''taint no sich thing; I went by de house las' night, fo' I start home an' ax Mars John for you; he say yes, an' ef I don't treats you right he gwine git my hide and tallow bof. An' Indy, what dat you tell me last night 'bout Mars Norman and Miss Jean?'

" 'Oh, George,' I 'low, 'bout half cryin', 'dat er lie; I make it ever bit, but, George, I tell you sometimes if ever I git out fum here, what make I do it.'

"Miss Jean never open her mouf, twell she say, 'George, don't you tell Norman nor nobody-yels; you jes come back and bring me er pen an' ink an' paper, now run home fas' as you kin.'

" 'George!' I hollers out fru de chinkin', 'I feard to stay in here, dese piles er cotton look jes like ghoses, an' I feared of 'em. George!'

I hollers still louder and crying', 'come back here!' But George he done gone, g-o-n-e. Den I wipe my eyes an' sot down on de loom bench, an' I take Miss Jean's haid on my lap an' I watch dem loops and piles er cotton; de more I look de bigger dey grow, an' dey looks jes awful, a-w-f-u-l, ready ter grab me, an' I say, 'Miss Jean, I never 'spect ter tell er nuther lie long as I lives, an' I ner 'spec's ter lis'en fru de key holes, an' I never 'spec's to stick my han' in de sugar bowl, nor fork out de sweet pickles nor de merserves when mammy not er lookin' at me, an' if you lives th'u' this trial an' triberlation and comes out in er whole piece, I wan' you ter tell mammy what I says, fur I never 'spec's ter see daylight ergin in dis world. An' tell George to be good an' not go sneakin' 'roun' fur de patter-roller ter git 'im an' ter meet me—meet me—Miss Jean, I clar I don't know whar ter tell you ter tell George ter meet me, 'cause I feels lak I dun no whar I'll be when I pulls up on yuther side, but tell 'im meet me wharever that is, fur I couldn't git long 'thout George, even ef de debil git us bof.' Den I cry right smart outer one eye, I got t'other pin' tight to dem cotton piles. Ever once an' whiles I say, 'Miss Jean, Miss Jean,' an' she say back, 'I here, Inder, wid my haid on your lap. Presen'ly I go fas' ter sleep, an' de moon hit move erlong

twell it strike de wes' winder, an' de rays comin' thu' the cracks of de windershetter, fell right ercross my face, an' I dream it was de biggest ghos' in de lot tearin' my ver' eyes out by de roots, an' I scream out, an' dar I was been fas' ersleep wi' my haid on Miss Jean's lap. She jes er laughin' at me. Dat Miss Jean, she not feard of nuthin', she not mad no more neither, she done storm it all out in the daytime, breakin' winders an' talkin' sass to her par. I never see her do sich things befo', an' I thought it must be sumpin' awful to want er mar' er preacher an' not be 'lowed to. Mars John he didn't sleep none neither, mammy say, he walk dat floor all night. Mammy and Sam they stay to the house an' set in the dinin' room wide er wake, whisperin' to one er nuther, fur every feared er Mars John when'er a mad spell catch 'im.''

"Poor dear father," said Miss Jean, resuming her story; "he was was so angry, so wrought up, when Ernest came and informed him for what purpose. For some time after Earnest had gone I was alarmed for the safety of every one. 'I will see you in your coffin willingly,' he said, 'before I will permit you to marry him, the presumptive, poverty-struck pulpit ranter.''

"'Father,' I interrupted, while the hot Southern blood was beginning to seethe in my veins, 'Ernest Irving is none of these, and I defy you; I will leave this shelter, never to return, if you utter another word to his defamation.'

"Heeding not my words, but pacing the floor back and forth, he continued, 'I will disown you! I will disinherit you if you persist in seeing that man again. I will lock you up in this room and hold you here till you are willing to receive my advice.' With each turn on the floor he seemed to grow more furious.

"'Love laughs at locksmiths,' I said, with a rebellious ha! ha! while my brain whirled with the angry blood coursing through it. I caught up a foot-stool and sent it crashing through the long French window that opened on the veranda. I laughed idiotically, seeing Inda who was at her old game, dodge the foot-stool, which move brought her to our view.

"Father was startled by this sudden action of mine, but in a moment he recovered. With anger more violent, he caught me by the wrist, drew me from the room, down the gallery, out at the rear of the house and on down to the buildings used for spinning and weaving, which did not possess the advantage of window lights, but instead there were barred shutters. Inda came weeping on behind us, and on reaching the

loom house door he thrust us both in. The click of the spring lock brought us to a realization of the truth, that we were prisoners. I heard father go into the adjoining room, and the next instant he was nailing the window shutters.

"My sensations were no longer those of excessive passion, my anger was transitory. I was accustomed to father's outbursts of temper, but I believed he loved me too well to be long resentful, the more violent the storm raging in his bosom the sooner it would be over, so I was confident of again seeing Ernest Irving, and the thought of his love made me very happy. Hope is buoyant at eighteen or nineteen.

"At dawn, George was back with writing material. Said he'd taken them from Norman's desk, and if I did not wish Norman to know, I must return them in the evening. "Very well,' I returned, 'you come at night fall.'

" 'Indy!' George called, 'you here yit?'

" 'Yes, I here yit, but it er mirackle I is here; I might nigh scart out er my hide, and so hongry I ready to eat my own head off.'

" 'Well, Indy,' continued George, 'I wanter say to you, Mars Norman 'lows we can marry whenever we gits ready; I got him put it down in white an' black. And, say, Indy, I got er notion in my head we'll marry like white folks, bein' as we done de courtin' dat er way. I don'

want no nigger preacher marryin' us. What you thinks 'bout it, Miss Jean?'

"I replied I thought well of his idea.

" 'Write it down and pass it out th'ough the chinkin'.'

"It was too dark to comply with this request, so I bade him return in the evening, as I supposed he'd find us there for a month to come.

" 'Oh Lordy!' yelped Inda, 'I die forty times ever' night I live, ef I have stay here dat long! Oh Lordy mussy!'

" 'Hush, Indy,' said George. 'De white preacher done promise me he harness me up when uver I come to him. He stay over to our plantation some an' I keep his boots dat slick er fly feard to light on 'em, feard he slick up and broke his neck; an' Mars Erns' Irvings, he say, "You's kind boy, George, here some money and when you gits ready to wear the matter-mony yoke, I harness you in free of cost." "Thanky, Mars," I say, 'I sho' pintedly not forgit it.' And, Indy, you git yourse'f ready; I ain' gwine have no foolin' 'bout dis bizness, and I wishes you bof mighty well, caze I goter hike out fum here, 'fo' dey mises me and makes quirations 'bout whar Ise been at.' The next instant George was gone.

"Pretty soon after this, Mammy Alice, who was Inda's mother, and the housekeeper also,

came with the key to give us our liberty; besides, breakfast was awaiting me and father wished to see me before leaving for the city.

"Present my compliments to father and tell him I prefer to remain in the loom-house,' I said to her. Inda had already escaped.

" 'Miss Jean, honey, you better come on to de house; you' paw, he done got over his tantrums; you jes' come right long er me; I done got you de bes' breakfas' you ever tas'e,' implored Aunt Alice.

" 'No, mammy, I can't go, though I thank you for the kind thought about my breakfast. Lock the door and go away.'

"I tells you," said Inda, "that ar was er tryin' time, for when Miss Jean say she gwine do things, she do 'em. Came by her hard head mighty hones', too, an' I feels lak I mus'n' leave her in dat loom-house, long er dem cotton banks, an' I jes' honin' ter be free, so I let off to cryin' and Mammy she jined in, and we had er camp-meetin' time for some little whiles. Miss Jean she say, 'Go 'long, Indy, and bring me some breakfas' an' de book I been readin.' "

CHAPTER XV.

THE PARTING.

"I was indeed glad to be rid of Inda and her superstitious mutterings at that time, but a sorry plight I should be in now but for her; besides, I was anxious to write Ernest. I knew father had been unkind to him, perhaps rude, harsh and impolite, and I longed to mitigate any pain father might have caused by showing my absolute trust in him, as far as any words of mine would suffice.

"After partaking of the dainty breakfast Mammy Alice sent me, I set myself assiduously to work on my letter, but was interrupted by hearing footsteps approaching. Father came and without comment locked me snugly in again and departed. I took my unfinished letter from its hiding-place and completed my message. Then I drew one of the large bags of cotton to the opening in the wall, lay down upon it and gave my attention to the book Inda brought me, but I soon fell asleep, for the previous night's vigil had made me slumberous. I was awakened

by the approach of Mammy Alice bringing my noon meal. Father had the key, so I was forced to receive my repast through the opening in the wall. I found my favorite viands on the tray and thanked mammy for her kindness.

" 'Honey,' she said, while her voice trembled with the emotion at work in her loving old heart 'I loves you like I does my own chillun, an' I never gwine forgit dat promise I make your own mammy when she dyin', to take care of you, long as any bref in my body. I done foun' out what Mars John lock you up fur, but not knowin'all de circumstance,I don't know how to 'vise you, yet I prays de Lord in glory hit all come out right. Ef you wants me to, I set right down her on dis do' step an' stay twell time to make de supper. Paul and Mr. Percy done gone off ter town long er Mars John.'

"Percy St. Leon was a lad father had employed to teach Paul, being a son of an old friend.

" 'No, no, mammy,' said I, 'you return to the house and quiet your dear, kind old heart. Father will soon outlive his anger, then all will be well,' I consolingly returned. But I was not to be left in quiet, for the loom-house was beseiged all that afternoon, when the little children down at the quarters became cognizant of the fact that I was within. I had to coax, per-

suade and finally resort to scolding ere I could rid myself of their presence.

"I awaited George's coming, but not alone, for Inda sat on the door-step outside. He was promptly on hand at an early hour, and with my letter I gave him my written consent to Inda's hand.

" 'Miss Jean,' said he, 'I gwine take dis letter, an' I dodge de patter-roller ef I can; ef I can't, I got dis old pass Mars' Norman gi'me las' week in case I needs one.'

"Then there was a low murmured conversation outside. Soon Inda called to me:

" 'Miss Jean, can't I go erlong er George, pleease um?'

" 'I can't see to write you a permit,' I returned.

" 'Yes'm you kin,' she pleaded; 'scratch it down whar I punch de chinkin' out.'

"I complied with her request and they left me alone once more.

"After that little unpleasantness at Harper's Ferry, each man and woman belonging to a plantation carried a permit from his or her owner.

"I expected father momentarily to come and release me. When he did not, I felt his anger had not abated, so I remained quietly on my improvised couch and watched the moonbeams

falling in parallel lines across the floor, and listened to the ever-wakeful mocking bird chanting his evening lay.

"I cannot say that I was supremely happy, yet I was not unhappy, for after ten o'clock I expected George and Inda's return at any moment. At midnight they came, bringing me a communication from Ernest, informing me they had returned as man and wife, thrusting through the crevice in the wall with Ernest's letter their marriage certificate.

" 'Miss Jean,' said Inda rather dolefully, 'I didn't want er marry so quick, but George he 'low ef I didn't marry him dis night I wouldn't never git de chance ergin; that he done made all the derangements, an' 'twas now or never. But I hope de Lord forgive me for gittin' mar'ed in dis old blue shambly dress you gi' me. George he walk up so peart I done tore de trail might nigh clean off.'

" 'Inda,'' I replied encouragingly, 'I'm sure if you try to make George a good, faithful wife, the Lord will overlook any deficiency in your bridal attire.'

"I insisted on George carrying Inda to the quarter, as they both were inclined to sit on the door-step and bear me company through the remainder of the night. After he had domiciled his bride, he went home singing through

the fields in a more joyous strain than I had ever heard issue from his capacious mouth before. George was truly happy, for Inda had kept him in hot water for the last six months by her inclination to flirt with Bob Stanton. She kept me informed as to the situation of affairs, but that trouble was now removed by George's last precipitate act, while the ghosts were after Inda and she felt the need of a supporting arm."

"Dat am de fac'," said Aunt Inda, laughing. "It cur'us how sich things do work, but I never seen er ghos' sence de night I married George."

"It was too dark to peruse my missive, so I fell asleep with it resting next my heart. I felt sure he had advised me in some way, and I knew I should be actuated in my after conduct by whatever he counseled my doing.

" 'Dearest,' he wrote, 'I regret much that I have been the means of interrupting the paternal attitude your father has ever assumed toward you, and if it is your desire I will withdraw my claim on your hand, but I cannot withhold my love. No, dear one, for my heart is wholly yours; come life, come death, through time, in eternity, it will know no change. Permit me, love, to advise you. Do nothing further to increase your father's anger. Think of all the care and devotion he has bestowed on you.

To you he has been father and mother in one. Love him, be patient with him; rather keep silent, than make rash promises you are not likely to fulfill. Say to him we will not marry without his full sanction, which I feel assured we will some day have.

"'You possess two loyal friends in George and Inda, whom I have just united in marriage, but we must find some other avenue than through their hands to communicate;it might be the cause of some unpleasantness to you or them.

"'Go to your father and tell him you regret having caused him pain, and that you love him all the more for being so faithful to what he considers your welfare. And, dear one, I hope the heart-ache, the doubts and fears, will give place to patience and sweet contentment. Be happy, be hopeful; with these words I resign you to our Heavenly Father's care till we meet again, which I hope is not far distant. I must say adieu.'

"At sunrise father came and unlocked the door. I was standing just inside awaiting him. When the door opened, I threw my arms about his neck and kissed him many times.

"You're my own precious, loving daughter again," he said, while he held me close to his heart in a warm, affectionate embrace.

"'Yes, father, I am yours until it is your pleasure to give me to the man I love, and who loves me so well he is not willing to cause me the pain it would occasion were I to marry him without your full sanction. He will not accept me without your approval of our union.'

"'It is well,' he said, releasing me and assuming an austere countenance. 'My daughter,' he continued, 'you do not know the suffering I have undergone since you forced me by your conduct to treat you so harshly. That man must renounce all claim on your hand. I will not countenance further attention from him.'

"'He will never do that, since I must release him ere he could take such a step,' I replied, smiling up into his face.

"'Come,' he said, 'we will settle this matter elsewhere.'

"I clung to his arm and would not release him till we reached the dining room, where we found Paul and his young tutor seated at table. Paul ran to me, kissing me fondly. I was sure he had not been informed of my imprisonment from his remarks.

"After breakfast father and I went to the library and held a long argument, arriving at the same point from which we started. I repeated my determination of not giving Ernest up;

yet I averred solemnly I would never marry him without father's consent.

"Not often did we communicate or meet after this, but when we did it was with assurances of love, and in looking back I count those hours the happiest of my life.

"In April following these last events, the boom of the first gun announcing war was heard at Fort Sumter, and before I was hardly made aware of it, we were submerged in a warfare that lasted four long, weary, dreary years. Every young man of spirit enlisted and marched away to the battleground, where many fathers, brothers, comrades and loved ones sank into nameless graves. Norman, Ernest, Kenneth and many others dear to us were the first to enlist.

"Oh! the anguish, the pain, the horror of it all, especially the last year of that trying time! The lines—

"If we knew from the first
What the years were to bring,
We would never be able
To frolic and sing'—

recurred to my mind often and often. It is wonderful how much the human heart can bear and brave and yet not break. In the happy, blissful years gone by, when my life was young,

when hope was buoyant and my heart light, had one hour of this dreadful war-time confronted me, suddenly, unannounced, I should have died at the appalling spectacle; but, coming gradually, we learned endurance in hoping for a propitious turn in affairs.

"Norman went out as captain of a company, but for daring and valor was soon promoted to that of Colonel. Ernest enlisted as a private soldier and was made chaplain. It is needless to linger over these details; very few now are interested in what transpired a quarter of a century and more ago. Suffice it to say, Enid and I were continually together, that I loved her dearly. One could not refrain from loving such a sweet, dainty, violet-eyed, rosy-lipped, tender souled darling as Enid Stanton. Having no sister, I bestowed my heart's affection on this gentle girl, which affection was returned in all sincerity.

"When Thanksgiving and the holidays were near, many kind remembrances were sent to loved ones. Box after box of edible dainties were forwarded to the bivouacked boys in grey. There was one very noticeable fact in Enid's conduct—Norman got the lion's share in each box sent from her hands; and she so often in our confidences dwelt upon the pleasing fact of Ernest and I being lovers. Gradually it

"I do not know," he said with a prolonged sigh, "people view things in a different light on a sick bed"—Page 181

dawned upon me that Enid held Norman shrined in her heart as the most perfect of all human beings, in truth, she loved him to idolatry.

"In the last months of the war, our forces were being concentrated at Richmond, Virginia, for a final struggle, when Ernest fell sick and Norman wrote me to hasten to that city. Father had shouldered his gun and gone to the battlefield when the emancipation of slavery was declared, therefore I had no one in particular to advise or interfere with my movements. Paul and I were with the Stantons at the time, and I prepared to leave for Richmond at once. Ernest had often written me, but had never once mentioned the fact of his lingering illness, the result of exposure, while suffering from measels. When I reached his bedside I was shocked to find him so near death's door, living only two days after my arrival. Putting my head down on the pillow near his face, I wept disconsolately for a long, long while.

" 'Oh, Ernest,' I cried, 'why did you not write me you were ill! so ill?'

" 'Because, dearest,' he replied with difficulty, 'I hoped for recovery, and I did not wish to add to your sorrows. I know you were distressed over the absence of your father, not knowing what might befall him, and I refrained

from writing my true condition, till my physician, when pressed for the truth, informed me I had but a few hours to live. Forgive me, my Jean.'

"'Oh, my love!' I cried in bitterness and anguish of heart, 'how can I bear this parting? Dear Ernest, why can I not die with you? Dear Lord, let him live, or let my life go out with his! Death holds no terrors; life will be nothing to me when he is gone; do not, dear Lord, treat me so cruelly—let me die.'

"My wailings filled the whole house. He strove to soothe my anguish in his kind, loving way, but I was disconsolate.

"'Dearest,' he said, 'when the end comes and we must say good-bye, do not upbraid death, but know in that land beyond the valley and shadow I shall find a place of sweet rest, and await in God's presence the moment wherein we shall be reunited. We shall there know no more pain, no more suffering, no more pangs at parting, the tears all be dried from our eyes. My love, be strong to do the right, be humble, be meek and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Read this Bible I leave you and follow its teachings. Lean always to influences of goodness and truth, learn to forgive; visit the sick and distressed, relieve want and oppression, lead the wandering feet into paths of peace and holi-

ness, and when this bitter strife is over, if Norman's life be spared and you could learn to love him, I resign you to him, for he is a brave, noble man, a valiant soldier. You will need a protector, so will Paul. Our sunny land is o'ershadowed by dark, lowering clouds, and should your father escape death on the battlefield, I fear he will not long survive thereafter, for, brave, daring man that he is now, when this bloody conflict shall have ended, with his cherished plans and hopes crushed, his beautiful home perhaps laid in ashes, his slaves scattered, their homes desolated, there will be nothing left but you and Paul, for he has sacrificed all of the means he had set apart for that "rainy day" we hear spoken of so often. And, dear Jean, if you could learn to love Norman—"

"Oh, Ernest!" I pleaded, spare me; I can not bear to hear you speak thus. I shall never love another, neither will I wed. I would willingly die with you were that possible, but do not ask of me an impossible thing,' my tears still falling.

"He continued talking in this strain till the dear lips that were wont to smile and speak only kind words were cold, dead and dumb, the loving heart stilled by death's icy touch, the eyelids closed forever.

"Should you ever visit Richmond Cemetery you may find this engraved on a simple white slab:

"Ernest Irving,
" 'Born 1839. Died 1864.
" 'Asleep in Jesus.'

"Bitter, bitter memories pass in sad review before my vision, yet it is needless to dwell upon the horrors of the closing weeks of the war. I tarried in Richmond after Ernest died, the few remaining weeks of the close of this bitter struggle and surrender, nursing the sick and wounded soldiers. I sent for Paul and kept him near me. He was a bright, impulsive boy, with our mother's beauty and father's fiery temper, which ofttimes I found impossible to control.

"One day father was sent in from the front with a mangled shoulder. How thankful I was that I had remained in the hospital. I was becoming so inured to the sight of the sick and wounded that the poignancy of the shock over father's condition was rendered less disturbing to me; yet I was tortured at thought of losing him, till assured by a capable surgeon that his wound was not a serious one. I watched by his bedside day and night till the delirium accompanying the fever abated.

"One day he said to me: 'Jean, my daughter, I regret I did not consent to your marriage with Ernest Irving. Should I not recover, you will have no one to care for you. I wish you could think more kindly of Norman.'

"It was torture to me to have him speak thus, and I thought perhaps he had not been told of Ernest's death.

" 'Oh, father!' I cried, 'did you not know Ernest was dead?'

" 'Yes, yes,' he replied slowly, 'but perhaps he would not have joined in this struggle had you married him; yet there is Norman.'

" 'Father,' said I, vehemently, 'do not mention this to me again, I will have you and Paul; I desire no other.'

" 'I do not know,' he said, with a prolonged sigh. 'People view things in a different light on a sick bed. I think our cause is doomed; I see only trouble and disaster ahead. Perhaps we shall be driven from our homes; there is as much justice in that as in depriving us of our slaves, and, my daughter, I feel were I to recover from this wound I could not long survive the trouble that awaits us, and I should like while I have time to write my will. I have lands in Kentucky as well as Florida, which I wish to secure to you and Paul, should your home in

Florida be taken from you. Some day bring me writing material and I will do what I can.'

"He was so persistent, that to gratify him, I complied with his request.

"Everything in the way of lands and homes he divided equally between Paul and me, with the understanding that Mammy Alice, her husband Sam, her children and her old mother, were to have a home, so long as they desired it, on the lands given to Paul and me, so long as we owned said property with enough tillable land to secure them a competency in the way of a livelihood. To all the old servants with families he left some token of remembrance.

"Had not father in his wisdom made such provision for Mammy Alice and her offspring, I should have been left destitute of the care and attention to which I had always been accustomed, for Mammy Alice and her children have practically had the care of me since the war, and I have ever felt that I was only a burden on their kind hearts."

"No! No! Miss Jean, honey," said Inda, while the tears were falling; "you's never been no burden to us niggers; you's been a great he'p to us. We didn't want no freedom ef it tuck you fum us; it broke our hearts long ago to lose you."

After this outburst of Inda's, Miss Jean went on with her story.

"Father never recovered; he lingered a few months after the war, then closed his eyes on earth's trials and sorrows. One day, just before he left us, he placed my hand in Norman's, for Norman was spared to us, but Kenneth, poor boy, was slain, falling with his face to the foe. Placing my hand in Norman's, he begged him to watch over Paul and me, a promise he faithfully kept while we lived near him. He asked me once again after father died to marry him. I had but the one answer for him, then he married sweet Enid Stanton.

"With Paul and me the struggle for a living was a severe one. Accustomed, as we had been, to every luxury, we were often reduced to the necessity of foregoing even the comforts of life. The few hands who volunteered their services on our plantation, after receiving their share of the products, there seemed very little left. The work was not carried on as systematically nor as thoroughly as before the war. The plantation hands were reveling in their new-found freedom.

"Norman looked carefully after our interests, of which he practically retained the oversight.

"Paul, after attaining his sixteenth year, grew restless and unhappy, for we had not the means to educate him as he desired. Each year it seemed our circumstances grew more straightened. Finally he suggested selling our Florida home and going to our Kentucky property, which we did. The money we received for our Florida home Paul spent in securing an education which fitted him for a lucrative position in a mercantile house. Father meant he should turn his attention to law, but he rejected outright the idea. Paul was developing into a very selfish man, which grieved me sorely. When I importuned him to allow me to accompany him and remain with or near him while he was pursuing his studies, he refused me this pleasure so emphatically and peremptorily, assigning so many reasons why I should not, that I did not again refer to the matter, for I was becoming timid, my vivacious spirit had deserted me; I feared Paul's outbursts of temper, and had fallen into the habit of yielding to his caprices. I was no longer the Jean Carvil of old; I felt sometimes that I had become almost an imbecile.

"So I remained here at home when Paul went to college. I had no companions save the faithful friends who were once my servitors, and are yet. I brought condemnation on myself for my way of living, but I had through sorrow

grown callous to all insinuations, all calumny, and now nothing touches me as at first when these reflections reached my ear. I have made few friends here in Kentucky. Only a few have sought me out, or shown a disposition to cultivate my friendship. The old life has slipped entirely from me. I left my dearest and most cherished desires in the sunny home where my girlhood was spent.

"You have a mocking bird here in Kentucky whose song resembles that of the Florida mocker. Not often, but sometimes, one of your birds will sing till the small hours of the night, especially on clear, moonlight nights. Many times I have sat by my window the night through listening to and eagerly catching every trill of its song, for it revives sweet memories of that far-off home I shall see no more, where the sweet-voiced singers cease not their lays day or night.

"I was very, very lonely when Paul first left me, and to fill up the tedium of the weary hours, I have gone often to the fields with Inda, George and their children and dropped the corn and beans in the furrows, or have taken a hoe and assisted in covering the grain. Mammy Alice wept bitterly over this at first, but before she died she grew accustomed to my peculiarities, and said but little. George and Inda, knowing my fondness for music, for three years saved a

little from their earnings and bought me a piano. George found a second-hand almost new instrument at a bargain. They presented it as a Christmas offering. I had no words to thank them for their kindness and unselfish thought of me; I just laid my head on Inda's lap and wept till I could weep no more. The piano proved as much a source of delight to them as me, for when the day's labor was over they congregated on the front lawn and listened to the old songs I learned back in the Southland.

"Granny Grimes, who came often to see me, taught me to knit and piece quilts. I have employed many hours in those occupations, piecing quilts for Inda and knitting for her family. In making her visits, Granny Grimes was invariably accompanied by Pete, between whom and myself there sprung a warm and lasting friendship.

"Paul remained three years in college, then suddenly, without warning, he returned, bringing with him a sweet, pretty little girl as his wife. To say that I was surprised, would express it mildly; I was not only surprised, but distressed, for I had cherished the thought that as I had surrendered my part of the means secured from the sale of the Florida property, to assist in his college expenses, he would some day make a home for us both; but I found to my dis-

may he had spent all our means and come with the request that I sell the half of this, our home, belonging to him; he was in need of finances to establish himself in business. I implored him not to do this, and used every argument I could summon to my aid, even resorting to tears, but finally yielding in order to hush his outbursts of violent temper. He was careful not to allow his pretty wife to overhear his importunate demands."

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS JEAN'S STORY CONCLUDED.

"Winning my consent to this last, and disposing of the land, they returned to Chicago, leaving me once again to loneliness and solitude, with assurances from Lucile, his sweet young wife, that so soon as Paul made a home of their own, I was to share it with them. She truly believed this, and showed much love and devotion for me, which I was not slow to trust and respond to; I was hungry for the love and consideration of my kind. But futile were my hopes of joining them. I never saw Lucile again; one year later death had claimed her. I was made acquainted with this fact by the coming of Paul, this time accompanied by a wailing infant. Lucile, when dying, begged him to bring her babe to me, leaving many messages and admonitions as to the training of her little girl. With a thrill of delight, I accepted the charge. Inda took the little one at once into her great, kind loving heart. She never gave her own babes more love and attention than she bestowed on this poor little motherless one, left to our care.

Every device she'd practiced or heard of was resorted to for its nourishment and comfort. She seemed never to grow weary; night after night she would take the little one from my arms, walking the floor back and forth to hush its wailings.

For a long while we despaired of her life, but she finally rewarded our efforts by developing into the sweetest, prettiest, most winsome little creature one ever saw. She filled my heart to completeness. I no longer yearned for companionship, no longer courted the acquaintance of the birds. Each moment, each hour, each day, my mind was occupied with thoughts of what method was best for her training; of how her wardrobe should be furnished; whether pink, blue, or white was most becoming; whether this little garment should be trimmed with lace or braid. Inda's taste and judgment were often requisite in the settlement of these momentous questions and in the fashioning of all these et-ceteras. We were both happier for the advent of the little waif, and Waif we named her. My days were no longer spent in solitude, I traveled no longer through the "vale of tears;" I lived in happy content; instead of sighing, I was singing. My mind became so absorbed in the care of my little charge that I did not remember I had ever been unhappy. She was the means of

bringing about me some of the children of this vicinity whom I had never met. Especially was I favored by repeated visits from Granny Grimes and Pete, who was then a small boy of five or six, and though there were other specimens of the Grimes family younger than he at home, he seemed to prefer the society of little Waif to that of his small sisters, being very chivalrous in his attentions toward her, bestowing gifts in numerous quantities and various qualities. His pockets were always replete with objects of virtu, and all bestowed on "Waitie," as he called her. Marbles, strings, pieces of broken china and glass, a box of fish-hooks, an old discarded cob pipe, etc.

"At one time he gave her a box of sugar-coated pills, one and all of which she would have swallowed had I not made the discovery in time to prevent the catastrophe. He was surprised that I should object to her having them; said he'd 'eated' one and 'twas good as candy—too nice, evidently, for any one but Waitie. He was a generous, kind-hearted little lad, and even at that early age gave promise of being something out of the ordinary, which promise is likely to be fulfilled. He has grown into an intelligent young man, with prospects bright for a successful career. He has always displayed excellent taste in his selection of books. I intend he

shall have father's library, or at least all the books pertaining to law; Paul cares nothing for them, and the books are mine to bestow where I choose."

I could but contrast the difference of opinion entertained by Miss Jean and myself as to Pete's ultimate condition.

"When Waif was four years old," continued she, "Paul married again, married a gay young widow, but I did not dream this event would cause a separation between my darling little one and myself until the day he came for her.

" 'No, no, Paul!' I cried, 'you cannot, you would not sever us; bereft of her I cannot live; surely, surely, Paul, you would not do so cruel a thing.' At thought of it I pressed her closely to my bosom and wept.

" 'Go way, papa, you make Aunty Deany cwy, go way, papa;" she nestled her little head close and lovingly on my neck.

" 'Oh, my darling, my precious one, I will not give you up!" pressing her close, close to my heart, while my tears flowed afresh.

" 'No, no, Waitie can't go; Waitie tay wi' Auntie Deanie. Don't cwy, Deanie.' With her little hands she wiped the falling tears from my cheeks."

At this moment Aunt Inda dropped the peacock's tail from her hand, and with an agoniz-

ing, prolonged wail, she threw up her arms, clasping her hands above her head.

"Oh, Miss Jeanie! Miss Jeanie, honey, don't bring up all dat mis'ble, heart wrenchin' times over ergin.' With tears streaming from her kind old eyes, she rose and fled from the room.

"My tears, my pleadings, united with those of Waifie's, were unavailing. We were torn ruthlessly apart. I was not even asked to accompany her, for he said his wife's sister was visiting them, and they were receiving many friends in honor of her coming; for the present their house was filled with company.

"Oh, the pain, the anguish, the utter desolation and hopelessness of this separation! Words are insufficient to convey to you the blank despair that settled o'er my life. Oh, how I missed the dear, clinging little arms, the bright, sunny curls that were wont to nestle near my heart each night, the sweet kiss that often awakened me from my slumbers in the morning. My heart went out in one agonizing appeal for the restoration of my darling little one. Waifie! Waifie! was my constant, longing cry, from morn till night, from night till morn. In my wretchedness, I upbraided God for taking from me mother, lover, father, home and now little Waif. I cried out in my grief: 'Oh, God, take from me my hope of heaven, and instead re-

store to me my precious little darling!' Vain were my importunities. I saw her no more for six long, weary years.

Pete often witnessed my grief and would strive in his childish way to alleviate the poignancy of my mental suffering, by placing at my disposal any and all of his childish treasures. With his little arms about my neck, our tears often flowed in concert, for he seemed inconsolable at loss of 'Waitie,' and declared often he would fight Waitie's papa and bring her home.''

These words of Pete's relative to the combat were prophetic, though we were all unconscious of the fact at that time.

''Poor little lad, for many days he wept afresh at sight of any of her belongings. A pair of discarded little shoes was the favorite receptacle of his tears, and I often found him kissing the shabby little broken doll she had left behind. We gathered up all her playthings and those of her dresses left, the little straw hat he had decorated with scarlet roses the day before her departure, and laid them sacredly, sadly and tenderly away, weeping more disconsolately than if our darling were dead. Pete never came but he looked sorrowfully at the little shoes and hat. The little shoes and hat gave signs of age, the roses withered and dropped their petals, but Pete's adoration for his little lost love seemed

not to lose an atom of its warmth, till Waif made us a visit when she was ten years old; he has never looked on those little articles of apparel since.

"At ten, she was a sweet, pretty little miss who had assumed city airs and graces. She had not forgotten any of her old friends, however, but clasped us each in a warm, loving embrace, presenting a rosebud of a mouth for our delectation. She did not overlook Pete in this respect, who flushed over her frank and ardent manner of greeting. He was a well grown lad of fifteen or sixteen, and not accustomed to caresses only of the type Granny proffered him, which were strongly impregnated with the smell of the cob-pipe. He came each day of her visit to me, but the reticent, shy manner never gave place to the free, outspoken, strong feeling of affection displayed for her in infancy.

I have long since relinquished the hope of ever claiming her as my own again, to have and to hold, but Paul is educating her, and whatever her home influences and environments may be, she has never forgotten nor ceased to love me. So soon as she learned to write, a correspondence between us began, which has never ceased. I never receive a communication from her but she sends greeting to all friends; especially in this does she favor 'Peep,' for she yet clings to

the name her infant lips gave him, asking after her knight of the sugar-coated pills, or of the millinery proclivities; ever in some pleasant way she asks after him. I would fain have her with me now in my illness, but she is in Europe with her father and knows not of my illness.

"Ah, well," she continued sadly, "it is almost over with now. Soon my frail barque will drift out to the other shore, and I look forward with longing to a release from sad reflections; for with hopes crushed in girlhood, my heart's cherished plans laid waste by a destiny over which I had no control, or had not the strength of mind or will to overreach, I have but few pleasant memories left for my mind to dwell upon. The greater part of my life has been spent in sad reminiscence and tears. Now, the grasshopper's song has become a burden, for I am no longer young.

"I have given to George and Inda this, my home, to do as they wish with. A well-earned compensation for the kindness, love and care bestowed on me, their for long years' pensioner. Paul may set up a claim, but I have guarded against all further infringements of my rights to dispose of what is lawfully my own. Paul is a wealthy man and no longer needs assistance."

After this long talk she was naturally weary, falling into a quiet slumber. She lived some months longer, then went quietly to her eternal rest, appointing Pete Grimes administrator. The home and all appurtances belonging to the farm were willed to Inda and George, Pete to look after their interests and attend to any legal matter necessary.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PICNIC AND ITS RESULTS.

Joe Benton's arrival from L—— College heralded the coming of Alma and the children, who soon followed, and then such a round of pleasure-seeking never came my way before or since. It was a dining at our house, a tea party at Bob Kenner's, a moonlight at Captain Hartley's, a picnic here, a fish-fry there, till my head, notwithstanding I enjoyed the buzz, grew dizzy at thought of so much gaity.

Alma entered into these pleasures with so much avidity that I hoped she'd gotten over that Colonel Tudor affair. She and Laura evinced a great warmth of friendship for each other from the beginning of their acquaintance, which lasted for a few weeks, then coldness or indifference took the place of this seemingly mutual attachment.

Laura had, through the influence of Doctor Brice, secured the fall and winter school, and it was only on evenings and Saturdays she had a leisure moment to receive or return visits.

The harvesting was over and Old Man entered into the sports of the young people and children with a hearty good will. At times his boisterous manner was not in keeping with his age and the requirements of a deacon of the church. Frequently he was more tumultuous in keeping up an uproar than the children. I distinctly recall one evening when our parlor was full of young people. Laura or Alma was playing a quick step, and I heard a pattering of feet just outside my window on the veranda. Putting my head out I beheld Old Man, unobserved as he believed, in his stocking feet, skipping and shuffling about, keeping time with the music. I looked on for a moment, then remarked to him dryly that I thought, for a pillar and deacon of the church, he was skipping it off in fine style. He looked real sneakin' for a moment, then assumed a sober air and remarked: "I do believe them young people will send me to torment if they don't put a check on their fun and frolic."

"But remember," said I, "they are young and full of vivacity and animation, and it's natural they should feel frisky, but you!"

"Well, now," he replied, "that is just where the whole trouble comes in for me. I feel as young as the youngest, and, like them, I'm so full of veracity and ammunition, that it stirs me up to the pitch I can't contain myself quiet.

Then the Bible says there's a time for dancing, and if I'm ever to fulfill that command, now's the time. So what am I to do?"

He always proved by the Scripture that his misdemeanors were Bible injunctions.

"You incorrigible old ninnie, come in here and go to bed, like any sensible, tired old farmer should," said I.

Pete and Laura were Alma's first callers. Lute, Callie Hartley, Jack Winton, Doctor Brice and a score of others came later, and how happy and bright life seemed for each and all of those joyous young hearts. Jack was growing either inured to his heart-ache, or was getting bravely over it. I wondered how any one owning beautiful Hazeldean could be altogether unhappy. And there were many other beautiful, God-given things in this life worth living for and enjoying. Oh, yes, "the world is full of beauty when the heart is full of love," and my heart was overflowing with love for my dear, kind old man, Alma and the children.

I had reached that point where I decided to let Jack and Laura work out their own salvation and to rest on my oars for a spell, let the world wag as it would. This resolution caught me one dull day when I was taking, or trying to take, my afternoon's siesta. A short while thereafter I was forced to change my mind, forced against

my inclination to put my oars in motion and battle against a high tide sweeping my way. It happened in this wise. Jack got to be a frequent visitor at our house, and it seemed each time he came Pete would be present, or drop in pretty soon thereafter. I paid little attention at first, but they got to be each so much in evidence, my suspicions were awakened. Jack would never carry Alma to church in his handsome vehicle but the following Sabbath Pete would, with Alma's consent, enjoy the same privilege, and, what was more annoying, she appeared to have a preference for Pete's society, although she was a dozen years his senior.

Pretty soon after her return she asked what had wrought such a change in Pete's manner and style of dress. I replied just as his mother made reply to a similar query of mine: "Combined with soap and water, and the winnowing of the laziness out of him by Laura."

"Oh, but," said she, "he is so polished and well informed. His gentlemanly, affable manner is altogether foreign to his former rustic deportment. Then he is conversant upon any topic you may introduce. Only last evening Mr. Winton and I were having a little dispute over some point in Roman history. I believed I was right concerning it; Mr. Winton *knew* he was, when Pete quietly informed us we were neither

one correct, and brought forward proof not to be disputed or questioned. Mr. Winton grew a little irate over the matter, but I was glad of the correction.''

Said I: ''The ignorance of Roman history is inexcusable in you; but it is not to be wondered over that Jack should grow rusty in such matters, having his mind so absorbed in farm work, beautifying Hazeldean, colt training, tater bugs and Laura Dane.'

''Laura Dane!'' she exclaimed; ''is he interested in Laura? I thought she was that rich banker's son's fiancee.''

''I don't know about the last,'' said I, ''but I do know Jack Winton loves her madly, and has since she was a little lass in short skirts, and you'd best not encourage his attentions.''

''I certainly did not know I had been making overtures of that nature. I shall hereafter be more careful and not pin my heart on my sleeve for Mr. Winton to peck at,'' she replied curtly.

''Oh, well, you need not throw him over as Laura has for that long-legged Irishman, Pete Grimes,'' I answered a litle snappishly.

She gave me a prolonged, questioning glance, then quoted:

'' 'Tis good in every case, you know,
To have two strings unto your bow;'
so I'll retain both.''

Now be it understood for a long while I'd had my eye on Doctor Brice as a brother-in-law. I thought it sheer nonsense in Alma to cling so obstinately to that love affair of hers occurring so long ago, say twelve or fifteen years or more or less gone. But it seemed these young people were making a fine mess of my mental arrangements, for though Dr. Brice had been Alma's ardent admirer for two or three years past, or whenever she was with us, he had of late transferred his attentions to Laura. I no longer favored an alliance between her and Norton; but for Pete, I had settled her and her bees comfortably down at Hazeldean, if there was any comfort to be found in having bees around.

However, at this period, I had given Pete to the four winds of the earth, to toss about and dally with at its pleasure; but I found Lute was decidedly interested that no rude winds should come Pete's way.

How did I gain this knowledge? Oh, there are many avenues through which you may acquire knowledge of this kind, or any other kind, if you're interested sufficiently to seek for it. I was not under the necessity of searching far; the knowledge came directly my way, and I seized it.

Since the young people had been gathering round me, I caught Lute looking at Pete oft-

ener than she did at Joe Benton or any other laddie; she seemed to regard the name of Pete as the most euphonious note upon which to harp; that Pete was referred to by her as the repository of all useful knowledge; that was the way I obtained my information.

Did Pete return this interest? The fact that he cared for none but Laura was plainly evident to me, whatever another's view might be. Had I been Pete, I should have succumbed to charms such as Lute possessed. To me she was a rose—a sweet, pretty wild rose, with the vividness of the wild rose-tint on her cheek, kind and loving to all, making glad the hearts of the depressed and lowly living near her. There are many such scattered over the earth, and the Station was not exempt from this class of people by a goodly number.

In September a Saturday pic-nic was sprung. There arose a little dispute as to the meeting point. Finally a location was selected by Pete in the Winton Woodland, near Hazeldean. The young people, and some of the older ones, grew very enthusiastic over the convivial time in prospect, for Jack Winton's agricultural tendencies had induced him to turn his attention to watermelon culture, and the consequence was, his crop was so immense he could not find a market for it, and as a finale to the day's pleas-

ure, Jack issued invitations to a watermelon feast in the afternoon at Hazeldean. The entire neighborhood was solicited to attend, regardless of color or previous condition. I pondered the propriety of this, but saw the wisdom of it when we assembled on the lawn at Hazeldean, for never was a lot of darkies made so happy, or kept so busy as this, rolling watermelons from ice cellars, spring-houses—handling wash basins, water pitchers, towels, napkins, carrying from the tables placed on the lawn, the rind from which the rich, lucious pulp had been abstracted and devoured in great quantities, the process continuing indefinitely, regardless of overcharged stomachs and headaches. No, no, never was a lot of darkies so happy. I believe some there would have exchanged their chance of Heaven for such another feast.

Uncle Tobe was commander-in-chief, master of ceremonies, or anything else that meant proficient handling of watermelons, giving utterance to "Glory!" whenever he cut an unusually large, luscious melon. He shoved the young negroes here and there with a "Step lively dar, you lazy coon, no time ter be foolin' 'roun'; an' don' lemme fine non dese knives an' towls, an' napkings come up missin'; ef I do, I know zackly whar ter fin' 'em. Step lively dar, Jupe, an'

bring dem ar muskmillions to de front—de likel'es ones in de lot, an' dem cantyoulopes wid de deep furrers. You Liz Vance, pass me dat butcher knife I see you feelin' de aige of, jes er minit ergo. Be perticler, or you cut dat pocket I see you slip it inter. Glory! Look out dar! you likely git hu't; I ain' got no time ter picks you up when I runs over yer. Pears lak you all niggers done los' yer git up an' git erlong; yer moufs spread lak er blowin' mocisin's, jes er grinnin' 'roun'; yer teef shinin' lak er white wash palin' fence; you sholy never see er watermillion berfo'."

I did not altogether enjoy this sumptuous feast, and there were others whose pleasure I believe was marred by an unfortunate little incident. Jack had been in pretty close attendance on Alma throughout the day, to Pete's chagrin, but in his home, as host, he was forced to distribute his attentions equally among his guests. Before the feast many of us sat on the veranda, a few having gone to the parlors. Laura, who had been looking pale and out of spirits for some weeks, was gayest of the gay throughout the morning. She came to the veranda and found a seat very near me, as I sat conversing with Jack's Aunt Emily. Pete was on the lawn at the foot of the veranda steps, teaching the children a new game. Of a sudden,

some one struck up a lively air on the piano. I heard a gasp from Laura, and the next moment she sped by me, with her hands pressed tightly over her ears. Stumbling as she ran down the steps, she fell headlong into Pete's outstretched arms. He saw her blundering down and saved her from further injury.

"Oh, Pete!" she gasped, regaining her footing, "where can I go to escape that sound?"

Looking into her face he comprehended the pain she was suffering at sound of the piano, once her own in happier days.

"Run to the end of the avenue, I will follow," he said in a low tone. She turned and fled down the drive like an arrow.

"De hare an' de houn's!" screamed Dennis Grimes. "Split for it, Miss Laura; jes' tar out er strip, we's er comin'!"

With a bound and cry of a hound on the scent, he landed in the middle of the drive and scampered after her. A dozen or more little boys fell in behind, rushing pell-mell in Dennis' wake, joining in the hound-like chorus. Those left cheered and shouted to the hounds, thinking it something improvised for their special amusement.

Pete made no effort to overtake Laura, but kept pace with the little boys. Suddenly I saw her drop down, the whole pack surrounding her.

I watched the chase, thinking it needless suffering. If she was so attached to the piano, why not wed Jack. I found him superior to Norton in all except beauty, and I believed she had. True, Jack was rather quiet than otherwise, but he bore the unmistakable sign of good breeding and gentle birth, and had wealth at his command. There was only one solution for me: that was she loved Pete Grimes; and what there was so magnetic about him, I was not sufficiently discerning to discover. Old Man said Alma, Laura and Lute had all gone "franzy" over Pete. My opinion was not so severe as his, yet I thought Pete was preferred by the three, and I believed loved Laura. Right or wrong, such were my cogitations, when aroused from my reverie by Jack's aunt at my elbow.

"Did you ever see a girl who could run so rapidly? She must be a hoiden."

"Far from it," said I, resenting her last words. "It is Laura Dane, one of the most refined young ladies I ever met. A sweet, loveable girl, with many charms; a graduate from one of the first colleges in our State. She ran to escape the pain the sound of that piano gives her; in her prosperous, happy days it was hers."

"Ah! I see," she returned; "I have heard Jack speak of her as a very cultured young lady,

high spirited and all that. I wonder how she failed to capture his affections, having charms so alluring."

"The failure was not hers," I returned, smiling. "You surely have been deaf to what rumor has to say."

"Ah, indeed," she remarked. "You see I go out so seldom. Hazeldean has so many attractions for me; besides, I'm indolent, too indolent, I believe, to cultivate my neighbors, but I'll see to it I cultivate that young lady, if Jack is interested in her. Does she live near you? Could you induce her to visit me?"

"She has no time for making visits. The care and responsibility of an invalid mother and little brother are hers. She is teaching the district school now; besides, she has an apiary which requires all her attention from April to July."

"How sad," she commented sympathetically.

"There you mistake again, she is too busy to entertain sadness, yet I often wonder over her cheerfulness. She has made many friends since coming among us, and has all of life except nineteen years before her."

"And that young man who ran down the avenue with the boys is Mr. Grimes, I believe. I met him when he came to see Jack about the picnic grounds. Is he—" She hesitated.

"He is a friend of Laura's, assists her with her school and in her apiary," I replied.

At this moment of our confab the little boys came trooping back up the drive. Dennis told us Miss Laura had fallen and sprained her ankle and Pete was going to carry her home. Later I found he had returned, and I saw him and Jack's aunt seated on a rustic chair, chatting and smiling at each other in a most affable manner. Afterwards I saw them looking over the watermelons, and when Pete and Lute drove off, one of the largest accompanied them with Mrs. Allen's regards to Miss Dane.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.

The beautiful autumn days were drawing to a close, and drear winter was fast approaching, but I heeded not the slipping away of the brightness, nor the incoming of the bleak, chilly days and nights. Having Alma, dear Alma, with me, I gave little heed to occurrences transpiring outside my own household. Yes, Alma was with us to remain until spring. Ah! if I could only have her to hold, I reflected, but that restless spirit kept her always wandering.

Just previous to the ushering in of winter, I decided on doing a little visiting. I meant my first call should be on Margaret Ellen Kenner. As I entered the hall I heard some one in the sitting room thrumming the piano. In passing the door, I discovered it to be Laura and paused to hear her song. I had not seen her for almost two months. She had ceased visiting us; I could not tell why, but a little restraint seemed to have fallen on her usually frank, cordial manner. Alma was still the recipient of much at-

tention from Pete, in the way of visits and the bestowal of flowers. All the leisure moments he could spare from his other duties he gave her. She said he was an absorbent to the fullest extent, that he was extracting from her every variety of knowledge she had at her command. They talked on religion, ethics, politics, metaphysics, and all the other ics in existence. I frequently grew tired of these harangues, but Old Man sat and listened with open-mouthed interest.

Jack came as often as he found time for visiting, but there was less frequency and his calls were not so protracted, for he lived three miles from the Station. Pete lived near us, and his length of limb made the distance seem less.

Yes, Laura appeared to have grown a little reserved toward me and mine. I attributed this coldness, in part, to Pete's interest in Alma, though I could have assured her of the absurdity of her jealousy, if that was the trouble.

Ah, well, young people contrive to be very enigmatical sometimes, and Laura's conduct on the occasion of my visit to Margaret Ellen was of this type—more of a puzzle than I could solve to my entire satisfaction.

She was trilling in sad, low tones that saddest of all old songs, "Parted." As the sad, sor-

rowful cadence fell from her lips, it sounded like a wail of the broken-hearted. What had befallen Laura that she should be sobbing this old melody in such heart-broken tones. Pete, nor any other man, was worth such devotion as the song and her manner implied. Yes, I was forced to pause outside and listen to:

"In the mellow light I sit,
Idly disregarding it—
Idly rocking to and fro,
As the moments come and go,
Asking vainly, asking why,
Fate has parted you and I.

"Ah! why is it there are few
Half so genial, half so true,
Half so near allied as we?
Yet an unkind destiny
Rears its cruel barriers high—
Fate has parted you and I."

"Is it, darling, is it sin,
Just to think what might have been,
To unveil my eyes and see
What can never, never be;
As I clasp my hands and cry,
Fate has parted you and I."

As the last words were uttered her head fell forward, and, covering her face with her hands, she sobbed convulsively: "Oh, why, why did I not tell Pete I loved him? The humiliation of confession couldn't have been worse than the thought of having lost him, lost him forever; but poor, poor, weak Fred—oh! oh!"

I longed to rush in and tell her she'd not lost him to Alma, who would scorn the idea of robbing any one of Pete Grimes, but I restrained my inclination, knowing this information she was giving utterance to was not meant for me or any other eavesdropper; so I stole silently on to Margaret Ellen's room, where I found her and Lute having a warm discussion over the most becoming style of making her (Lute's) new dress. Margaret Ellen was inflexible in her determination to have it made according to what *she thought* most suitable; and Lute was equally *inexorable* in her determination to thwart her mother's wishes.

Peace resumed its sway immediately after my entrance, and Margaret Ellen began recounting to me her ailments, which were numerous and diversified. She said she'd been at Bob to make her some crutches for use when the rheumatism got her to the extent she'd be no longer able to use her limbs, which she was calculating

would be the case that winter, and, said she: "I sent by Pete to L———— for a half-dozen 'Poorman's plasters'—they'll be of service, probably, when the doctor can't be found; but Pete said he thought it would be an in-in-in—what was it, Lute, Pete said about the plasters?"

"Oh, ma," spoke Lute a little crossly, "he said it would be an incongruous mixture for a rich woman to use a 'Poor man's plaster.' "

"Oh, yes, I remember now," her mother returned. "He also said they might have the contrary effect to the one desired, and when he gave them to me he remarked I'd better be careful when using them, or I might get inoculated with the disease called im-im—what was it, Lute?"

"Impecuniosity," answered Lute, recovering her good humor.

"Oh, yes, so it was, impecuniosity; Lute always remembers Pete's very words, but I forget; he makes use of such cranky ones to get me tangled, I suppose; but Bob told me I need not be troubled about catching impecuniosity, for I was overstocked with it already. I didn't catch his meaning altogether, but I guess I shall find out all about im—impecongruosity, or whatever you call it, for I'll sure use those plasters.

I see they're highly recommended in a little book Granny Grimes brought me—dear old lady that she is."

Lute looked at me, while a doubtful smile played about her mouth.

At this moment Laura entered smiling, with all trace of her recent sorrow gone. Girls with heartache smile easily, I have found.

She met and greeted me with such unfeigned cordiality, giving me the kiss she seemed always to think due me, that I rose and embraced her warmly, exclaiming:

"My dear girl, I feared I had lost you."

"Oh, no," she returned, "I've had no leisure for visiting; my time has been given all to my school. I don't wish to prove an unsatisfactory teacher, and teaching the 'young idea how to shoot' is no joke; yet one should not fall out with one's bread and butter."

She said this while pinning on her hat.

"Come see us soon; mother speaks of you so often, and wonders why you have ceased to visit us, and says her first call when spring returns is to be given you."

I reckoned on going to see her right away, but Joe was making arrangements to return to college, and I was kept busy assisting in the preparations for his departure.

Laura's school closed and Pete went to college with Joe. His father refused to aid him, but he worked his way through his first quarter's term—sweeping floors, carrying coal, making fires, etc., and paid his tuition. With the money he received for assisting in Laura's school, he boarded himself by renting a room and doing his own cooking.

It was conceded by all, especially by Bob Kenner, that no such young man as Pete had ever been found about the Station.

"Bound to make his mark, he is," said Old Man.

I thought to myself he'd already made an indelible mark on Laura's heart, but I'd undergone a change in thinking Pete was a good-for-nothing, and, with the rest of the Station, condemned Barney's methods.

When the holiday convivialities and stir had ended; when Joe and Pete, accompanied by Lute, had returned to college, I walked over one afternoon to visit Mrs. Dane and Laura. I was admitted by Kenner, and as I entered the sitting-room from the front, I saw Nellie Bond escaping through another door.

The cordiality of my reception was assurance that I was a welcome visitor. Mrs. Dane was no longer an invalid, her strength had re-

turned, slowly but surely, and with returning health there followed a striking individuality, that of a sweet, cheerful disposition—a wonderful tendency to find the silver lining to each cloud. With optimistic eyes she now viewed life a sweet boon, given to each individual to turn to account in the best way possible. Said, with spring's return, it was her intention to visit each and every home about the Station; that all had been so loving and thoughtful of her comfort while she lay almost a helpless invalid.

"Nellie Bond," said she, "has been the most careful of nurses, but poor Nellie, I cannot understand her growing nervousness; why, instead of smiles on her lips there are often tears in her eyes; and she now avoids meeting friends who so frequently called."

Said Laura: "I do not know why, but Nellie is getting restless and unhappy. I ask her sometimes if she is no longer content in making her home with us. With a burst of tears, she invariably replies, she will never be so happy in any other home. Some day I will ferret out her trouble."

"Oh, yes," continued Mrs. Dane, "and we will do all we can to bring back her smiles, and

help her to regain the happiness that once was hers, poor Nellie."

Along in February, Deacon Smart fell sick—very sick—of fever. Old Man and I were called in to see him die. It was not a political discussion between Dick Smart and the old man on this occasion, but a wrestle on Old Man's part with the "Angel of Death" to spare the life of Dick to his weeping children and disconsolate wife Jane. His prayer was a labyrinth of loud, wordy, vehement outpouring of expressions, not half of which I could understand, or link together in a comprehensive way, but the dear Lord understood the desire of John Isaac's heart, and also the tangle of his intricate and mazy words, for Dick Smart, at the close of the prayer, was growing warmer instead of colder, and continued thus improving till recovery was reached. And to this day he declared that prayer of Old Man's saved his life, and never again should politics, as a topic, come up between them.

At twelve o'clock, when we perceived the decided improvement in the deacon's condition, we started on our return home. Through nigh ways and by ways we took our course homeward. Through the school-house lot, bordering Mrs. Dane's orchard, we went. Just before reaching

the stile we heard suppressed voices, one a woman's distressed voice, the other a man's. I was alarmed at first and gave Old Man's arm a pull that brought him to a standstill. "Listen," I said in a whisper, "what is that?"

It was the woman's voice sobbing almost inaudibly: "I cannot; oh I cannot! They would not receive me, they would scorn me."

"Hush!" spoke the man in low, emphatic tones, "would you have the whole world hear you?"

"What is the world to me now?" she moaned.

"I will give you money," he continued; "you must get away."

"Oh, what can I do, where can I turn?" Then vehemently she continued, "Marry me as you promised me you would."

"I'll tell you," he said, in a conciliatory tone, "I will give you money to go to your uncle, then I will follow you and marry you."

"Oh, if I could believe it!" she cried.

Right here Old Man gave a decided clearance of the throat, the talk ceased, and we continued our journey. He had not heard it all distinctly, being somewhat deaf, and, like myself, was in the dark as to whom the voices belonged to, or the meaning of the strange conversation.

Here was a mystery, or something that assumed the form of mystery. I disliked mysteries, but this was one worthy of penetration. Was it any of my affair? Oh no, yet a troubulous thought permeated the whole occurrence. At first I would not give heed to a lurking anxiety that persistently took possession of me, presenting itself, ever and anon, diligent and unrelenting in its attack, till finally I put the question to myself in a not to be evaded way: "Was that woman making night piteous with her weeping, Laura?" Laura was a girl who found, like almost every other girl, a real or fancied something to cry over occasionally. I had found her in tears once, which must have proved solacing, for an hour after no tear stains or trace of grief was left. It often happens that a wounded heart is like a cut finger, which takes but little time for healing, and a few girlish tears proves an aid to the heart healing process.

But this night's incident—this midnight encounter of ours— in which tears proved not availing. Ah, well, time would reveal it all. But do you think I could dismiss it from my mind? Oh no, not I.

CHAPTER XIX

OLD MAN'S EXPERIENCE IN BEE KEEPING.

Spring was advancing with slow but sure tread. The valley mists, the soft tints gleaming amid the hedges, the blue haze hanging over the distant hills, the caw of the noisy crow, were all heralds of spring's approach, and anon it came till the last days of April were over us, bringing an unheralded contretremps, or "country tramps," as Old Man persisted in calling the word. In fact, it appeared that the "country tramps" came not singly, but in pairs, or by the bunch, following closely in the footsteps of each other, which for unexpected surprises was unprecedented for me, as far as my journey on life's pathway had run. Alma had departed with the appearing of spring, so I was forced to entertain the "country tramps" alone.

Now be it known in the autumn previous to this spring I'm talking about, Old Man John Isaac Spindle had got the idea into his bald head that he must keep bees. Laura's investment in

that line had got him partly crazy, and when he one day in June or July went over to Jonas Piper's, who lived three miles away, and saw Jonas robbing a bee hive, the job was finished, and he was a fit subject for the insane asylum on the bee question. It was a warm day and he came in from Jonas' puffing and perspiring; dropping onto a chair, he drew each shirt sleeve across his brow, pulled the old hat he was wearing from his head and began fanning energetically. By his flurried manner I knew something unusual had occurred, and I awaited developments.

Pretty soon he began: "I tell you what, old 'oman, I saw the finest sight this morning my eyes ever beheld! I got over to Jonas' just as they began robbing the bees, and they took up-'ards of—oh, well, I don't know how much, honey—more'n a hundred pounds, and t'was as easy done as settin' on a rockin' chair and rockin' yourself to sleep. Neither Jonas or the boys got a sting. Jonas has his bee hives so built that all you have to do is to open the top story and you behold the honey in all its—its grandeur and sweetness. You lift the boxes off and cut your honey out, and so—" Excitement precluded further words for the moment.

Flip, flap, flip, went the old hat.

"I tell you, old 'owman, it was a rar' sight, and ther's money on top of money in bee raisin', shore there is; look what it's doin' for Laura?"

"Where were the bees, while he was robbing?" I asked slowly and calmly, as I could, not wishing he should get more excited than he was, not knowing what might happen.

"Oh, they were there in the hive, only a few on the boxes they removed. Jonas, he gave a puff out'n a little bellows he had some coals of fire and a few chips in, and the bees were gone before you could wink. I jest never seen anything to beat it. A fellow could get rich terrec'ly raisin' bees." And the old hat flew faster and faster.

"Where were you, John, when Jonas was robbing?"

"Standing 'round, here and there, lookin' on. Bees are harmless if you go at 'em right. I tell you 'twas a sight worth seeing, and I couldn't bear the thought of deprivin' myself of the pleasure of owning bees, so I ups and bought a stand from Jonas."

It was my time to be excited now, and I exclaimed almost breathlessly: "What! You have gone and bought a lot of bees to get stung to death with, John Isaac Spindle?"

"Stung to death! Who's goin' to get stung to death?" he fairly yelled.

"Well, I should like to know who you think will attend to your bees? I'll not, and you needn't count on it."

"Who axed you to 'tend to 'em? You'd better wait till you're called on before you take the house-top off raising a row about things that's none of your concern!"

"Stop, John, don't use too strong language. I inferred you'd be no hand to boast of at caring for bees when you allowed the wasps to chase you from the barn; and one time I knew an old bumble-bee to chase you out of a forty-acre field. What will become of you when a whole army of bees attack you at once?"

"Who said anything about wasp-es and bumble-bees? Wouldn't I be a putty fool to go and buy a lot of the plaguy things? You're always blabin' about something nobody else is thinkin' of. I guess I can attend to my bees, and I'll thank nobody to interfere, neither. Ef you'll attend to your own business you'll have enough to do. Some folks is always meddlin' and kickin' afore they're spurred."

"Oh, well," said I, "I trust the bees will not turn out a failure, as that wagon crank did."

"Off the table he came, over the chairs"—Page 231

When I mentioned the wagon crank, he bounced up, and away he went to the barn; for truth to tell, he'd been fooled into buying a little crank—an article to hoist wagons on to grease the wheels. He honestly believed that no such useful thing had ever been put on the market before; he not only bought one for home use, but bought the right to sell in two districts, and was wild as a loon, thinking of the money he'd coin out of that crank. I informed him there was no money in it, except what he'd paid out for the fun of getting cheated. He was fearfully angry over my words, and said I was too meddlesome, and I'd better attend to my own affairs. So I turned the matter loose, and one fine day he hopped into the spring wagon and sailed out, with hopes running high.

I was to overlook the farm hands, see that the stock was fed and watered and attend to my household affairs. He would be absent two weeks on his first trip, and with the money he'd realize from that, he would be enabled to buy up other districts—extend his tours and double his money, not only double, but tribble and foubble it. That was his calculation.

Every day he was gone, after I got through with the cooking, dish-washing, sweeping, dusting, etc., I would bridle and saddle the old

switch-tail sorrel mare, ride over the farm and direct the work. I was often quite weary when the evening shadows fell, but I consoled myself with the thought that possibly this turn would cure him, and he would never go on another wild-goose chase afterwards.

The two weeks had not expired, when we were blessed with the sight of him. He drove in late one afternoon, looking forlorn and dejected. I had missed him greatly, exceedingly uneasy, too, for fear of trouble coming his way, consequently I was delighted at beholding him again, and ran to the barn gate where he was pulling the harness from the mule. The very first words he gave utterance to were: "I'm tired and hongry and sick; is supper ready?"

"John," I asked, in anxious tones, "did you realize as much profit from your crank as you believed you would?"

Said he, solemn as a funeral: "That crank is the blamedest swindle ever a man was swindled on. I hain't sold nary single, solitary one, and I'm out ten dollars for traveling expenses, besides what's gone for the right to drive round over the country and make a darn fool of myself. Every man I tried to sell to belittled the thing, and I was cancelled out here, there and

ever' where. One place at which I stopped, they give me jest less'n no time to git out'n the neighborhood, and threatened me with cat-o'-nine-tails ef I didn't git up and dust; the case was a hunchin' one, and I had to git."

He wound up by saying, if he could lay hands on that dog-goned agent that sold him the crank he'd beat some honesty into his hide.

I offered no word of condolence, neither did I jeer at him. I might have said, "I told you so," but I bridled my tongue, kissed him affectionately and spoke kindly. I prepared him a tempting supper and kept cheerful, thinking possibly this might be a lesson not easily forgotten, but it appeared I was mistaken, for here he'd gone and bought bees; furthermore, I knew there would be no peace till he'd tried every new invention in bee culture.

When the proper time came for moving bees, he paid two men a dollar to fetch them home. Then he bought a wire bee bonnet, a pair of elastic gloves and smoker to use while robbing and hiving; and he got Jonas to make him two hives, in the event they swarmed, which they were sure to do. The bees and equipment cost him ten dollars—that to start on. He paid Jonas five dollars for a fine hive filled with bees and honey. My mouth watered over the thought

of the nice honey I could buy with that sum; but 'twas useless to speak a word in protest, all I could do was to allow him to run the length of his rope and choke down. And for all he said I was to have nothing to do with his bees, I knew just how much that signified, for there was nothing under the heavens, save a rattlesnake or mad dog, he feared more than wasps, hornets or bees.

And May, beautiful May, came dancing in o'er hill and dale. The birds warbled, the lambs frisked and frolicked; across the sunbeams the butterfly was glancing; the honey-bee was wearying of its old home and seeking new quarters; in other words, swarming. Laura's bees had been swarming every day for a week.

One day as we sat eating our dinner, Jupe, the hired boy, came to the door with the startling intelligence that "Dese here bees out here in de yard looks like dey's havin' a pic-nic."

Up Old Man hopped, and dashing out into the yard, shouted: "They're swarmin', they're swarmin'! Run, Jupe, to the barn and fetch the big cow bell. Bring my bonnet and gloves, old 'oman, and have everything ready, it's a master big swarm. Git a newspaper and put in front of the hive and the turkey tail to bresh 'em off."

The bees poured out, whirling and dashing round till the air was thick with them.

By the time Jupe came with the bell, the old man had donned his gloves and bonnet.

"Now, Jupe," said he, "rattle your bell lively. Come a little nigher, they'll not sting ye" (he forced a little hysterical laugh), "I'll 'tend to where they settle."

Jupe went to work with the bell, and the din he created was so great I retired to the dining room and shut myself in. Pretty soon I heard Old Man yelling for me. Says he in his flurry and forgetfulness: "You're always out o' pocket when you're most needed. Fetch a bucket of water and the long-handled dipper, and fling water up among these here bees; I believe the plaguey things are gwine off. Jupe! Quit rattlin' that tarnal bell so loud!"

I stood and dashed water up among them, till they began settling on an old apple tree bough. Then he said again: "Some of you run and fetch the hand-saw from the shed, and bring out the little table and a chair."

'Twas some of you run here, run there, run yonder, some of you do this, do that and do the other, till the last bee had hitched on to the bough.

Jupe and I comprised the "some of you," and we collected the articles called for with the utmost speed at our command. Old Man stood off at some distance and gazed up into the apple tree, as if life depended on the severity of his gaze; finally, picking up the table, he placed it carefully under the bees, putting the chair by the side of the table he called out: "Jupe, get a forked pole to rest this limb on, then git on to the table and hold to the bees while I saw the bough off. Be careful now and don't let 'em come down with a thump, ease 'em down, and take the limb and shake the bees off onto that paper you see in front of the hive."

"I 'spect, sir," said Jupe, "you better do de seasin' down and shakin' yourself, as you has on de bee rig. I can clam up er tree like er coon, see!" and before you could say scat, he was up in the tree.

"Now you pass me up de saw, and set dat forky stick hunder de lim', and off she comes."

Old Man was taken aback over this maneuver of Jupe's, but said nothing as he stepped from the chair to the table, passed the saw up and put the rest under the limb.

The sawing began.

"It's might' nigh off, kotch it, sir," says Jupe, as a handful of the bees rose up to his neighborhood.

"Good golly!" exclaimed he, as he tumbled down head foremost and struck for the fence. Over he went—across the lot, through the pond, over another fence and on, on, at a breakneck gallop, to his mammy's cabin, a half-mile away.

Old Man tottered and wobbled about with his limb for a short while, then all at once he let it go and down it came, "kerthrash!" He then began to dance around on the table, and to give a slap here and there. A handful of bees were performing a war dance about his bonnet; in fact, they began to assail him in all quarters, taking him wherever they could find him.

"Slap, slap"—he made a misstep forward—"slap, slap, slap"—off the table he came, over the chair, down, under and up again; the bees going down and returning with him; his bonnet fell off, but he rose running and shot for the garden gate, which, fortunately was open. Through the pea vines, over the potato ridges, across a row of butterbeans, tearing along—turning summersaults and taking steps that seemed beyond mortal legs, the bees in full chase. On and on through the strawberry bed

and down to the hedge he flew, scattering things as he went.

I stood off at a safe distance, not knowing whether to laugh or be frightened, finally yielding to the former, when up spoke two or three small voices—"Ye, ye, le," close to my ears, sharp as needle points they spake. I turned and fled into the house, closing the door behind me.

I waited quite a while for the appearance of Old Man, but he came not. Growing restless concerning him, I caught up the camphor bottle and went skirmishing around those bees and down to the hedge, where I found him in a heap on the ground, submerged in trouble, his head partly in and partly out of the hedge. He was bent nearly double, clinging to his nose with one hand, with the other rubbing his stomach, groaning loudly.

"John, dear," I asked, tenderly, "are you damaged much?"

"Killed said he, "or same as killed. When I fell off'n that table, the blamed chair post struck into my in'ards, and my stomach is punched through my backbone; the bees have stung me to death. I'll never be able to eat or drink again; I'm done for this time."

The thought of never being able to eat or drink again brought about a very unpleasant

state of feeling, and he groaned two or three groans in a bunch.

"Don't relinquish your grip on life so readily," I advised. "As long as you continue to breathe you'll live."

I sat down by his side and drawing his head gently on my lap, bathed the wounds with camphor. I finally persuaded him to return to the house with me, and lie down. He asked where Jupe was.

I answered: "If he is traveling at the rate he was when last I saw him, he must, at least calculation, be about seventy-five miles due west of here by this hour."

"I don't know," he said, lugubriously, "what'll be done with them confounded bees."

"Don't allow yourself to be troubled about them," I admonished. "If they fly away and you never hear of them again, the loss is not much, but a good riddance."

He turned his face to the wall and continued: "I aim to make Jonas Piper take 'em back, and if he objects, I'll put the law ag'in him for gettin' money under false pretences, for that's just what he done. He shall take 'em back, he shall do it!"

He groaned very energetically again and said I must send for Jonas to come and hive them.

I went into the yard, thinking I would reconnoitre and find what those bees were doing. To my surprise, they were all clinging to that apple bough, which was leaning against the table where it had fallen. I rescued the bonnet from the sorry plight in which I found it; I donned it and the gloves, then sneaked quietly up to that limb, raised it gently aloft, and carrying it to the hive, shook the bees off onto the paper. They began pouring in—a perfect stream of them. I gave another shake and another. Finally, only a few remained outside buzzing around, but I felt safe under shelter of bonnet and gloves and very proud of my achievement.

Jonas did really take the bees, which was a great relief to me, for they caused the old man to use some very strong language, but he recovered from that bee venture without anything of a serious nature resulting from the encounter, and he realizes he has no talent for bee keeping, that he stands in the same relation to bees that a red rag does to a beast of the bovine family.

CHAPTER XX.

A CATASTROPHE.

After Pete's term at college expired, he returned home, where he and Laura took up their occupation in the bee yard once more.

One morning, some weeks after the old man's heroic effort at bee-keeping, I sat on our front veranda quietly perusing the "Daily News." I was deeply interested in my occupation, nevertheless my ears, as ever, were on the alert to all outward noises. Suddenly there reached me an unusual, peculiar sound—a whirring, accompanied by a pattering of horses' feet. Turning my eyes in the direction of the disturbance, I perceived approaching from up the road, at unusual rapid gait, a horse and vehicle, in which was a man, pulling desperately on the lines, and whose seeming intention was to keep the flying animal in the middle of the smooth road.

Oh, yes, certainly it was Jack. Previous to this it had been Jack and the colt, now it was the colt and Jack, for undoubtedly the animal had gained the mastery and was running away. In

an instant they were opposite me. Here the colt swerved a little to right, bringing one wheel in contact with the stout hitching post—result, a smashed wheel and Jack's unconscious, bleeding form lying by the roadside. The colt sped on with the remnants of the cart.

I hastened out, reaching Jack at the same moment Pete did.

"My God! Is he dead?" he questioned, excitedly.

"I think not, I trust not," I replied, anxiously. "Do you know what frightened the colt?"

"In passing Miss Laura's just now, it became a little unmanageable, Jack seemed not able to restrain it—dashing through a swarm of bees flying and buzzing across the road, seeking a bough on which to settle, and becoming so infuriated at the sting of the bees, it bolted. The handsomest, most spirited young horse Jack has ever owned," said he, "but it would not be any more good."

A moment later a white dress fluttered at my side, and Laura sank on the ground by Jack's side, with an agonizing stricken cry. "Oh, my love! My poor, poor love, I have killed you!"

She swayed blindly in Pete's direction, and I believe would have fainted but he had an eye on her as well as Jack, and took strenuous meas-

ures; catching her by the shoulder, he gave her a rough shake, followed by a slight box on the ear.

"See here, Laura," in a decided tone, "don't act silly, 'nough to do now to get Jack around without a collapse from you."

It seemed to restore her equipoise, for she eagerly, anxiously said: "Oh, Pete, only tell me he will live! What would life be to me with my poor laddie gone!" This last was sobbed out. A moment more and she had Jack's head on her lap.

I hastened for water and restoratives, thinking to myself that affairs were beginning to assume new forms, or was it an old form asserting an external appearance for my special benefit. Pete had accused me of obtuseness, which I angrily had resented; but here was confirmation that he was correct. Therefore, I was forced to make acknowledgement to myself that I was not so wise or penetrating as Solomon; although Old Man, when I particularly pleased him, had accused me of reaching the Solomon status in knowledge; when displeased, however, he would refute the charge by denying me possessed of even mother-wit.

On my return with camphor and water, the only restoratives at my command (I could not

have kept house without both of these), and just before reaching them, I saw Laura bend over and kiss the poor, pale lips that perhaps would never again speak words of love or utter pleadings that were unheeded by her. What if she were, true enough, too late with her acknowledgements of a return for his devotion? Why had she not made that acknowledgement ere this? Another mystification for me. Well, I didn't just for the moment care, if only Jack recovered, which then I thought doubtful, for there was a great gash cut on the brow near the temple. The secrets and mysteries might take care of themselves, if only our good, beloved friend lived. These were my thoughts under the excess of present anxiety. I gave Pete the bottle of camphor and basin of water. I found him busily engaged searching for a pulsation of the heart, and though a witness to the kissing episode, he pretended not to be, but remarked, while a gratified smile lurked about the corners of his mouth, "He'll be around all right pretty soon, I think."

While Pete and I chafed his hands, Laura uttered not a word, but sat quietly with Jack's head on her lap, the tears one after another slipping from the pretty brown eyes and falling on the stricken face below; tenderly and lovingly she wiped them away.

That kiss, the loving touch and the tears, all revealed the state of feeling she no longer strove to conceal.

Soon a faint tinge of color appeared on his face, the eye-lids slowly lifted themselves to fall more quickly.

"Shall we not carry him indoors?" I questioned. "I will assist you, Pete."

"No need," he answered, and, young giant that he was, he lifted Jack tenderly up, bore him safely to the hall, and deposited him carefully on the sofa. Laura followed, and leant helplessly against the stair railing, seemingly unable to speak again after that one, wild, frightened cry.

Pete knelt by Jack's side, bathing the bruised and bleeding face as tenderly as any woman. I bustled 'round, got hot and cold water, flourished the camphor bottle, occasionally putting a few drops of the contents about Jack's nose. I could see he was reviving.

"Hello, Jack!" called Pete; "better?"

The eyes opened slowly and wandered over the room, then came back to dwell on Pete's face, while the color mantled quickly to cheek and brow.

"Yes, I'm better," came the answer. "Are you all here? What has happened?" Again the eyes searched the room.

"Only about four of us left to tell the tale, a few bee stings and a first-class smash-up. Have a drink, old boy;" and raising him gently, Pete placed the water to his lips.

"Where is the colt?" was the next question.

"In Halifax, if he hasn't halted at any of the many stations on the route."

"And—and Laura?"

Pete looked round to where Laura had been, to find her gone.

"Never mind now, Jack, allow me to inspect your bones."

He took each arm and gently moved it to and fro, went through the same process with lower limbs, the while watching Jack's face for any indication of suffering.

"See here, Jack, own up now, acknowledge you weren't half so dead as you pretended. Didn't you appreciate the situation to the degree you'd like to have it repeated?"

"Possibly not, and I am willing to undergo any pain or suffering that would give me an acknowledgement of Laura's—of a kindly feeling from her," he answered quietly, hesitatingly, to both of Pete's questions.

"Where is Laura?" he questioned again.

"Skipped to parts unknown, through sheer anger at herself for having at last, over your dead body, as she believed, confessed to loving

you. This after tantalizing and harrassing our two lives out of our bodies in an effort to get at the truth," Pete ingeniously answered.

"Our two lives?" Jack interrogated.

"Yes, our two lives," reiterated Pete. "Fighting your battles, I have run various and all kinds of risks at having myself kicked out of her good opinion with my impertinent prying; jeopardized my dignity and rendered uncomfortable our mutual friend here," looking at me, "by running after Miss Alma in a most distracted manner, to prevent your attentions. I found it gave Laura pain to have you even look in the direction of any other woman, especially one so beautiful and attractive as Miss Alma, whom I think had the good sense to interpret my intentions aright. You undoubtedly gave Laura excellent cause for jealousy."

"Why did she not tell me this long ago? God knows I have suffered for want of this information," said Jack, sighing.

"I fathomed Laura's heart," continued Pete, "when she first came among us, but she obstinately refused to own the truth, for certain obligations she believed resting on her."

"What obligations?" asked Jack, regarding Pete with sharpened look.

"Oh, you know very well she is betrothed to Fred Norton, who threatens to kill himself if

she violates the promise made him in a childish, foolish moment, before she knew her own heart. It required time and skill on my part to ferret this out, but I obtained the information I sought without her suspecting my intentions."

"It appears to me I might have been made acquainted with these facts long ago," said Jack, lugubriously.

"I made an attempt to introduce you to them, but you refused in a most dignified manner the pleasure of their acquaintance. You gave me such a rebuff I thought it prudent to allow you the comfort of eating your own heart out."

"I remember about it now," said Jack, "but believe me when I tell you I did not understand your meaning—I certainly did not."

I left the room in search of Laura; not finding her, I returned. Pete had Jack on his feet aiding him in walking over the room, but his gait was unsteady, and I advised him to lie down again and keep quiet, at the same time informing him of his inability to get away for several days.

"Yes," repeated Pete, "keep quiet and blissful. I will take the overland route to Halifax in search of the colt."

He did not go straight to Halifax, he went in search of Laura. With more success than I, he

found her. They were on the back porch. I heard him singing. Wondering what there might be to call forth a song, I stepped out to find him with Laura's hands clasped tightly in his, so as to insure no escaping. He was swinging her insanely around and about over the floor, his own feet clattering to the music of that old Scotch song "Jock o' Hazeldean." On he went bouncing her about altogether against her will. Not heeding my presence, he continued his song:

"Now let this wilful grief be done,
And dry that cheek so pale,
Young *Fred* is chief of Everington,
And Lord of Langly dale.
His step is first in drink saloons,
His taste for wine is keen,
But aye, she loot the tears fa' down,
For Jock o' Hazeldean."

He so perverted the words of the old song as to make them apply to Fred Norton, repeating the refrain over and over—

"But aye she loot the tears fa' down,
For Jock o' Hazeldean."

Seeing Laura's displeasure at such rudeness, I went to the rescue.

"Pete!" I exclaimed in angry tones, "hush that up and let loose her hands before I box your ears; what do you mean by such rudeness?"

"Oh! the delight to find Miss Laura can, under stress, tell the truth—

> " 'For aye she loot the tears fa' down,
> For Jock o' Hazeldean.'

"*Au revoir,* ladies, I'm going for bees, not colts." He ran down the steps and was off like a flash.

I turned to Laura and putting my arms about her I said: "Laura, dear, put aside your grief; come, Jack is impatient to see you. We understand it all now. Pete has known the situation all the while and explained to us."

"No, no, Pete, great, kind heart that he is, he cannot understand Fred's frailty, nor the temptations that assail him at every turn. Although promising me never again to visit his old haunts, I'm sure he does, for his mother supplies him with money, notwithstanding his father has forbidden her thus to do, and also forbids him returning home. And do please," she said imploringly, "never mention to any one all that occurred this morning. I cannot see Mr. Winton again. You do not know the trouble that I

have wrought by my foolish conduct, but oh! I thought he was dead!"

"Surely there can be no wrong in letting the world know you love the man who adores you?" said I.

"But the consequences of permitting the world to know."

"You will surely grant him one moment's interview," I said pleadingly.

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot! Tell him I am most miserable, most unhappy; some day I may tell him all."

"Laura, he knows all, and you surely have not that confidence in Fred Norton as to believe he would put into execution any threat he has made. He is not so eager for death; don't think it, my dear girl."

"You cannot understand what his troubles are. His father will not permit his return home ever again, and has severed all near and dear ties, I am the only real friend left."

"Marry him, then, and put an end to his sufferings and bring upon yourself eternal sorrow.'

"Oh, I could never do that, no, never, even if I did not—did not—"

"Not even if you did not love Jack? I can say it for you. You do love him, and why will

you continue to persecute him and yourself as you are doing?"

"Fred, you know, would—would kill himself if he knew—he certainly would, and I would be his murderer. I will suffer anything rather than that. I wish you could understand how horrible that thought is to me, but you cannot. I'm going home now," and ere I could protest she was gone.

When Old Man came in to dinner, he went in search of the colt; finding it in such a crippled condition as to render necessary the immediate ending of its life and sufferings by the briefest method—that of shooting.

Jack remained with us another day and then returned to Hazeldean a smiling, happy man.

I did without the sight of Laura for a month, then a longing took possession of me to look into her dear eyes once again, for there was pity mingled with love I bore her now, and I went in search of her.

I found Pete snugly ensconced in the bee yard, the inevitable book in hand, pouring over it with a happy, contented look on his fine, strong face, for I must admit I had learned to admire him.

After greetings, I asked for Laura.

"Gone," he said briefly.

"Gone where?"

"Texas," he answered, with the same brevity.

"What on earth has she gone to Texas for?"

"You ask me too early in the proceeding," he replied.

"When did she go, and will she ever return?" was my next query.

"Yesterday morning, and soon, I hope—couldn't get on well without her. The honey crop is to put on the market right away, and all the disposition I know to make of it is to eat it."

"You will not tell me why she went, or anything."

"Yes, I could make up a very plausible story and recount it to you, but I've turned a new page in my day book, and am striving with great difficulty to not deviate from the truth, and don't wish to break over just in the outset of my good resolutions."

"How full of whims and peculiar ideas she is of late," I remarked. "I hope no harm may befall her."

"To be whimsical is woman's prerogative," he answered, "and she has proved her capability of taking care of herself along with various others. In proof, here am I; but for her I should be a wanderer, not knowing what use to make of my life. Then here of late she has conceived the idea of making of Nellie Bond a

trained hospital nurse, or doctor, or some such useful member of society. Says her tact and kindness in a sick room is phenomenal."

"What does she propose doing with Jack, think you?"

"She will marry him and manage him. His proclivities for or career at colt training is about ended; she will not risk his precious neck in such another escapade as the one he has just finished up."

"And what is to become of you?"

"I shall go in pursuit of law and order next year in Judge Hollis' office."

"And you never loved Laura, Pete?"

"I have adored her always, but not in the way you imagined."

"Fred Norton, what will become of him, poor man?"

"He will continue his journey to the devil. Laura can not redeem him, however well she may have laid her plans to that end."

"And Lute, do you propose making a law partner of Lute?"

I had caught him fairly, for the audacious young man actually blushed and stammered: "I —I shall have to win a few laurels ere I take oath on that proposition. Paterfamilias might not be willing to take into consideration a matter of such importance to him this morning, to-

morrow or next day; so do not press me for an answer under three years."

"I discover you have been considering the matter, at any rate. And, Pete," I continued, apologetically, "you have been to me all this time the unknown quantity, with the other young people I have been on more familiar terms, though I believed I understood you best, till here of late I confess I was making mistakes, and I feel as though I should offer you an apology, and also my congratulations, but for what, I cannot precisely focus as yet. And since there seems a little indication of mystery in the atmosphere of this vicinity, I will not go indoors, but bid you adieu."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BROKEN BOND.

I awaited anxiously Laura's return. In ten days she was home again. I was at the grocery store when she alighted from the train. Following in her steps were two men—strangers, but that was no unusual thing; these men were wearing the garb of the rough, working class, neither was that circumstance unusual.

So soon as she singled me out among those standing about, she came hurriedly towards me. Kissing me affectionately, she inquired after her mother.

"All well, everybody well, but you truant; where have you been running off to, without even giving one a chance to wish you bon voyage. And you look weary and sad-eyed—anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, much; but, so far as I am able, I will right it. Can you and Uncle John (she'd called him Uncle John from their first acquaintance) come over and sit an hour or two to-morrow evening?"

"Certainly we can, though I had intended—"

"No matter what you intended," she said seriously, "it is imperative that you come."

"Laura, you know my aversion to mysteries, in fact, this whole township is antagonistic toward secrets; we are not happy while one exists in our midst, so out with it."

"No, I cannot now, but come at seven o'clock."

She turned from me and walked back to those two strangers, spoke something to them, when all three proceeded to Barney Grimes' boarding house. Turning in the direction of home, I looked incidentally across towards the ticket office. I saw Fred Norton sitting idle and alone on a barrel near the door. He saw me and raised his hat in recognition. He was not the same Fred Norton I had seen there eighteen or more months previous. Most perceptible were the down-grade indications. Pale, forlorn, dejected, a shabbiness about his attire never by me observed before. I had not seen him for six months till now. Poor, poor Fred, could anything ever restore to him his former happy condition? Should he reform, the remorse for having willingly gone astray would linger. Who was to blame for his downfall, what had been his environments, what the influences in his early

downward career? Was Pete correct in saying he acquired the habit of imbibing wine at his own board? Was progressive euchre, in which parents, sisters and the elite of the city were participants, in his father's palatial home, responsible for his gambling tendencies, as Pete believed? Had he been a boy of mine, or a relative I loved, I think it would have broken my heart to note the change in him and know the cause. I'm sure I should have shed tears enough to have drowned him. Thinking seriously about the matter, I did not so much blame Laura for the interest she was taking in him. Poor, fallen Fred!

I put aside my engagements, picked up my knitting, and with Old Man, walked over to Laura's at the appointed hour. All was quiet and peaceful, seemingly, about the house. We met our minister there, a not unusual thing, as he visited frequently each house in the village. Mrs. Dane was perceptibly nervous. After greetings were over, Laura sat calmly down, not speaking again, but evidently listening. Soon footsteps were heard on the porch. She rose and opened the door. Fred Norton, a sullen look on his countenance, entered, followed by those two strange men I had seen with Laura, who at the moment of their entrance left the

room, but instantly returned leading in Nellie Bond, wearing a nervous, frightened look on her pale face. Laura led her to Fred Norton's side. For just one moment Nellie looked imploringly up into his face. Just one moment, there was hesitancy in his look and manner, then he reached out and took Nellie's hand in his own, the minister rose and began the marriage service. I was busily engaged with my knitting, but on the instant I cast it from me, rose to my feet, pulling Old Man up with me, wondering what all this meant. With solemnity the minister's voice rose and fell as he proceeded, accentuating the "will you" and so on. I looked at Fred Norton; a new light, a new resolve seemed to have entered into his being; he lifted his head aloft and gazed intently at the minister, and without hesitancy responded to the questions.

Turning to Nellie after the ceremony he said: "Nellie, you are the only friend left me in my adversity; all have fled or turned coldly aside but you, and I swear before Almighty God to love and protect you as long as our two lives are spared to each other. We will leave this accursed country, never again to breathe its vile atmosphere. It will not be painful for you, dear, you have no ties to sever. The links that bound me to kindred and friends I have broken by profligate use of opportunities with which I have

been amply endowed, but I can and will make amends. And you," turning to those strange men, "need hound my steps no longer. I shall take far better care of her than you have done. Long ago, when I was but a lad, I found her and her mother dying of starvation and neglect; I conveyed them to a hospital where the mother —your sister—died; since then I have cared for Nellie, and if wrong has come of her trusting, loving confidence in me, her only friend—"

"Say not her only friend, since coming to me," said Laura. "I have loved her dearly, and to shield her from the calumny of the world I played the part I have in this affair. If I have done wrong, I pray for forgiveness. I feared any attempt on my part alone would be futile, so far as carrying out the consummation of what has just taken place. After a full confession from Nellie here, I went for her uncle, not knowing what other course to pursue."

"True," she continued, turning to us, "he has been for twelve years a friend to her, caring for her in every possible way; secured her a home with a kind family, had her educated, and now—"

"Hush, Miss Dane, if you please!" commanded Norton in a more peremptory tone than he had ever used toward her before, I am sure, for

she gave a perceptible start and looked at him wonderingly. He continued:

"'Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart—'

And so help me God, if atonement can be made for any evil I have done others, or myself, I will make reparation. Come, Nellie."

Laura caught up a hat from a table near by and placed it on Nellie's head, kissing her adieu in a most affectionate manner. The door closed, shutting out the minister, Norton, Nellie and her uncles. Laura dropped on a chair and cried for about three minutes, then raising her head she laughed.

"I would not laugh, Laura," said her mother, in a rebuking tone, "till I found whether or not I had married her to a man likely to treat her kindly, for you undoubtedly forced the marriage on him."

"It was the only right thing to do," she returned petulantly. "What else could or should I have done?"

"Besides," I averred, "it was the only means of severing your own bonds."

"Yes, yes, you done right, Laura," put in Old Man. "You done right, you did. I heerd him promise her he'd marry her, so did this sugar

lump standin' right here by my side. We both heerd him, the night Dick Smart died—I mean the night he didn't die,'' and he went on to relate the little incident and the conversation we overheard in Laura's orchard.

Said she, facing me: ''After that you should not reproach me with wrong-doing. I could have worn my chains through time, uncomplainingly, rather than have the consciousness of a great sin, or permitting a great sin weigh me down.''

''Oh you needn't have feared his putting into execution his menace. He rarely ever kept his engagements, you know. But your confidence in him may be restored by the fulfillment of his promise of amendment made this evening; and Laura, don't tell me you were wearing your chains uncomplainingly. The most woeful complaint I ever heard fall from human lips you gave utterance to in that sorrowful old song, 'Parted' I heard you singing last autumn when you believed no one near, and the little talk you held with Laura Dane and her conscience after the song ended. But verily, verily, I had wrong conceptions as to whom I should apply the '*you*' in connection with the 'I' in the song, and I came near revealing I was an eavesdropper by rushing in and disabusing your mind of the idea you had, through Alma, lost Pete's affec-

tion; at that time, I believed you were greatly enamored of Pete—''

''And I 'lowed you was, too,'' interrupted Old Man in a surprised tone, ''and if 'twan't Pete, nor Norton, who in the nation could it 'a been you was hankerin' after; old Brice, hey? I notice when there's a passle of unmarried men around and gals, vicey versy, you may look out for breakers.''

''Yes, heart breakers,'' I volunteered, looking meaningly at Laura.

Picking up my knitting from the corner to which I had flung it, and winding the thread about the needles, to prevent losing them, I proposed journeying homeward.

''Laura, I infer you will need us again soon as participants on a similar occasion,'' was my good-night speech.

But an entire year sped by ere she would consent to marry Jack, holding herself aloof, hardly permitting him to take a fair and square look into her sweet brown eyes. ''Doing penance,'' Pete called it. I sometimes questioned if she meant to marry him at all. But Jack told me she confessed to him she had loved him always, not realizing the wrong she was doing herself or him when she yielded to the pleadings of Fred Norton that she marry him; yet she could never get her own consent, so far as to fulfill

the promise, because she discovered her heart belonged to Jack alone.

One day there reached her a letter from Nellie, the first intelligence they received after they left Kentucky. They were living in a thriving little town away off in Southern California. Fred was practicing law—had numerous clients had turned resolutely away from strong drink and gambling—that they had named their little girl Laura Dane.

Yes, she married Jack, and a happier couple does not exist outside of Paradise. Though Jack declared to me once he was very jealous of Laura's honey-bees, she was entirely too devoted in her attention to them, and asserting her independence through so much money-getting.

Her bees were truly a source of remuneration, but Old Man looks glum when I remind him of the money he lost in not keeping bees.

And Pete, you ask? Well, now, I'm under the necessity of informing you of my well-laid plans going astray once more as regarded Pete, but more anon.

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